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*Ernest H. Gough*

YALLA-Y-POORA,

442, BETHUNE ROAD,

STAMFORD HILL, N. 16.

A COLONIAL REFORMER

YALLA-Y-POORA,  
112, BETHUNE ROAD,  
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COLONIAL REFORMER

BY  
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AUTHOR OF 'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' 'THE SQUATTER'S DREAM,'  
'THE MINER'S RIGHT,' ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

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## CHAPTER XXIV

IN the strange exceptional condition of nervous tension up to which that marvellous instrument, the human 'harp of a thousand strings,' is capable of being wound, under the pressure of dread and perplexity, there is a type of visitor whose face is always hailed with pleasure. This is a fact as unquestionable as the converse proposition. For the *bien-venu* under such delicate and peculiar circumstances, helpfulness, sympathy, and decision are indispensable. Of no avail are weakly condolences or mild assenting pity. The power to dispense substantial aid may or may not be wanting. But the friend in need must have the moral power and clearness of mental vision which render decisiveness possible and just. His fiat, favourable or unfavourable, lets in the light, separates real danger from undefined terror, offers security for well-grounded hope, or persuades to the calmness of resignation.

A man so endowed, in a very unusual degree, was Mr. Levison. Deriving his leading characteristics from Nature's gift—very scantily supplemented by education—he yet possessed the rare qualities of apprehensive acuteness, intrepidity, and discrimination in such measure and proportion as a hundred prize-takers at competitive examinations might have vainly hoped to emulate. Like

that Australian judge, of whom the American citizen, in an inland assize town, is reported to have said, 'Wal, Judge Shortcharge may be right, or he may be wrong, but he *decides*. I go for the judge myself.'

Abstynens Levison much resembled that brief but weighty legal luminary, in that, after due consideration of any case concerning which he was minded to give judgment, his verdict was clear and irrevocable.

For this reason the soul of Ernest Neuchamp was glad within him at the prospect of hearing from the lips of the grave, undemonstrative, unwavering pastoralist words of comfort or of rebuke, which would be to him as the Oracles of the Gods.

'Jump off and come in,' he said. 'Delighted to see you—horse knocked up as usual? We'll take the saddle off here, and let him pick at those reeds; they're better than nothing. I was having a go-in at the garden here, just to take it out of myself a little, and forget my annoyances. But we must have some breakfast, though we are all going to be ruined, as you say—and it looks very like it.'

As Mr. Neuchamp in his revulsion of feeling rattled off these greetings, partly in welcome and partly in explanation, his guest removed the saddle and several folds of blanket from the very prominent vertebræ of his gaunt courser, watching him roll and then attack the scantily furnished reed-bed, with much satisfaction.

'Where did you come from this morning?' inquired Ernest of his guest, as, after a prolonged visit to the bath-room, they sat down to breakfast; 'you must have made a very early start if you came from Mildool.'

'I camped on the river,' said Mr. Levison, attacking the corned beef in a deliberate but determined manner;



'in the bend, just below those free-selecting friends of yours; you don't seem to have been getting on well with 'em lately, from what they say.'

'We are not on good terms, I must admit,' replied Mr. Neuchamp, with a slight air of embarrassment, recollecting Levison's prophecy of evil, which had been verified to the letter: 'but it is entirely their own fault. I was much deceived in them.'

'Very like,' answered that gentleman, with as near an approach to a smile as his grave features ever permitted. 'It takes a smart man to be up to chaps of their sort.'

'Did you stay there?' asked Ernest, anxious to lead the conversation into a less unsatisfactory channel; 'they have not made themselves a very convenient dwelling.'

'No!' replied Mr. Levison, preferring a request for another instalment of the cold round of beef. 'I never stay at a place if I'm going to make a deal. It makes a difference in the bargain, I always think; and I wanted to make a little deal with those chaps, from what I heard as I came up the river.'

'A deal?' said Ernest, with some surprise; 'and how did you get on? I shouldn't have thought they had much to sell.'

'Well, they've got a middling lot of quiet cattle for one thing; they're regular crawlers, but none the worse for that if grass ever grows again. Then they've got, what with their selections and pre-emptives, a tidy slice, and of not the worst part, of Rainbar run. And as there was a friend of mine that a small place like that would suit, and the cattle and the few sheep, at a price—at a price,' he continued, with slow earnestness—'why—I'll ask for another cup of tea—I had an hour's mighty hard dealing, and bought the whole jimbang right out.'

‘Indeed!’ said Ernest, gratified in one sense, but slightly alarmed at the idea of a second pastoral proprietor being introduced into the sacred demesne of Rainbar; ‘but they have to fulfil their residence condition, haven’t they, according to the Land Act?’

‘Of course I made *that* all right,’ affirmed the senior colonist. ‘They’re bound down to reside till their time is up, and they don’t get the balance of their money till they can convey, all square and legal. They didn’t know me, as luck would have it, and I dropped to their being very eager to sell out. These kind of chaps never look ahead beyond their noses, whereby I had ’em pretty well at my own price, for cash—cash, you know. A fine thing is cash, when you take care of it, and bring it out like an ace. It takes all before it.’

‘What did you give for the cattle?’ asked Ernest, with melancholy interest.

‘Well, these small holders always believe the end of the world’s come when they find themselves landed in a real crusher of a dry season. They think the weather is bound to keep set fair for a lifetime. I showed ’em how their cattle was falling off, and at last they offered the lot all round at eight and sixpence—no calves given in, except regular staggering Bobs. And so my friend has the run, and the stock, and the pre-empt all in his own hands. He’ll do well out of ’em, or I’m much mistaken.’

‘And does your friend propose to come and live here?’

‘Well, he might, and he might not. I think I’ll take another egg—fine things eggs in a dry season. I expect your fowls live on grasshoppers pretty much. You see, if he could get two or three fellows as he could depend on to take up some more of the best bits of the bends, leaving a slice here and a slice there—so as it’s not

worth any one else's while to come in, because they'd have no pre-emptive worth talking of—he'd be able to keep all that angle pretty well to himself, and I believe it will keep well on it a thousand head of cattle some day.'

'I'm afraid it will spoil the sale of the run,' said Ernest, with some diffidence; 'not that it will matter to me much, as I shall have to sell out whether or no, and at present prices there will be little if anything left. You will have to take your cattle back if they're not paid for.'

'Well, I don't say but what it *might* spoil the sale of the run, especially if my friend was to be wide awake and take up his fresh selections with judgment. And don't you think, now,' Mr. Levison interrogated, fixing his clear gray eyes full upon Ernest's countenance, 'as it was a blind trick of yours to go and bring these chaps here, like a lot of catarrhed sheep, all among your own stock, just to make it hot for yourself and crab the sale of the run, supposing you wanted to sell?'

Mr. Neuchamp had in his hours of remorse and repentance sufficiently gone over the ground of his errors and miscalculations, so as to be very fully convinced of the folly of this his most indefensible proceeding. He had been thirsting for the words of the oracle. Now that the hollow sounds came from Dodona's oak, he liked not their purport. The spirit of his ancestors, temporarily oppressed by misfortune, awoke in his breast, and he thus made answer: 'My dear sir, I am most willing to own that I have in this matter acted unwisely. And the more I see of this great but perplexing country, the more ready I am to admit that extreme caution is necessary in many transactions where such need does not appear on



the surface. But I have acted in this, and in all other stages of my Australian career, upon the principle of attempting to do good to my fellow-creatures, and of raising the standard of human happiness and culture. Such motives I hold to be the true foundation of every instructed, christianised, and, therefore, permanent community. Want of success may have attended my efforts to carry out these ideas; but of such efforts and endeavours, whatever may be the result, I trust I shall never feel ashamed!

As Mr. Neuchamp uttered the concluding words of this vindication of his faith with a kindling eye and slightly raised tone, he held his head erect and looked with a fixed and rather stern regard at Mr. Levison, as if defying all the Paynim hosts of selfishness and monopoly.

Mr. Levison met his gaze with a moment's searching glance, and then, with a relapse into his ordinary expression of judicial calculation, thus answered—

‘I ain’t going to say that you are acting altogether wrong in trying to right things in a general way in life. There’s more than you has noticed a lot of wrong turns and breakdowns for want of a finger-post or two. And I like to see a man back his opinion right through, whether it’s right or wrong. But if you lose your team, and break your pole, and spoil your loading when you’re on a long overland trip, how are you to help your mates or any other chap that’s bogged when they want you to double-bank? That’s what I look at. You’ve got to stand and look on, just like a broke loafer or a coach passenger. What I say, and what I stick to, is that a man should make sure, and double sure, of his own footing, and *then* he can wire in and haul out any man,

woman, or child as he takes a fancy to put on firm ground. But, if you go too fast, and your agent drops you, and you want to help a fellow, why, you're bust, and he's bust, and what can either of ye do but sit on your stern fixings and look at each other?'

Mr. Levison's illustrations were homely, but they had a force and application which Ernest fully recognised.

'You have the truth on your side,' he said, after a pause. 'I see it now—very plainly, too. I wonder why I could not see it before.'

'There's a deal of studying required, it seems to me,' propounded his eccentric mentor, 'and a deal of experience, and knocking about, and loss of time and money, too, before a man comes to see the *right thing at the right time*. That's where the hardship all lies. If the thing's right and the time's wrong, *that's* no good. And the right time and the wrong thing is worse again. What you've been a-doin' of ain't so much wrong in itself—only the time's wrong, that's where your mistake is,—except things take a great start soon; and I don't say they won't, mind you.'

Here Mr. Levison looked at Ernest with an expression half humorous, half prophetic, so extremely unusual that the latter began to wonder whether there was any case on record of half a dozen cups of tea having produced temporary insanity. But the unaccustomed gleam departed suddenly from the dark, steadfast gray eyes, and the countenance resumed its wonted cast of calm investigation and unalterable decision.

'Does old Frankston ever give you a dressing down in the advice line?' inquired Mr. Levison, without continuing the development of the idea he had last

started. 'Because if he does, you'd have a bad time of it between us. But I've done all the preaching part of the story for this time, and I'm a-going on to the second chapter. Do you know the friend's name as I bought these Freeman chaps out for?'

'No,' said Ernest. 'I shall be happy to afford him all the assistance I can—that is, if I'm here, you know,' he added, with sudden reflection.

'That's all right; but he's a youngish chap, and easy had. Will you promise to advise him to live economically, mind his business till times improve, and not waste his money, above all things? Tell him I said so.'

'I don't think I am the best adviser you could pick in that way,' said Ernest. 'I am too sensible of my own defects; but I will deliver your message and add my feeble weight to the influence of your name.'

'That's all right, and handsomely said. Now, my friend's name is Ernest Neuchamp! I've bought the land and the cattle for him. They're cheap enough if he never pays me for them, but I believe he will, and that those Freeman chaps will be biting their fingers at letting themselves go so cheap this time next year. But, mind you tell him not to waste his money. Tell him Levison said so. Ha, ha! I must start now.'

Mr. Levison laughed for the first time since Ernest had made his acquaintance. It must have been the sight of Ernest's wonder-stricken face which caused this unprecedented though brief incongruity.

'I can never sufficiently thank you,' he said; 'but where's the money to come from? The station will never pay it.'

'That's more than you can know,' answered the Changer of Destinies; 'It's more than I know, too. I



don't mind telling you—as I said before—you're not likely to interfere much with any man's profits. But cattle are *going to rise*, and that to no foolish price. You mark my words. Before this time twelve months fat cattle will be worth five pounds a head, as sure as my name's Ab. Levison. And if rain comes—and I've seen some signs that I have great dependence on—store cattle will be two and three pounds a head, and hard to buy at that.'

These last words he uttered with great solemnity, and Mr. Neuchamp perceived that he was fully imbued with faith in his own vaticinations.

'I hope it may be so,' Ernest replied. 'Good heavens! what a wonderful change it would make in everything. But why should stock rise so?'

'Because the *glitch of gold* is increasing every day and every hour in these colonies. Don't you see the papers? I thought you was sure to have read everything. Why, you are not half posted up. Look here!'

Here he produced from one of his capacious pockets a much worn and closely printed Melbourne *Argus*, in which mention was made of 'the astonishing discovery of gold near Bunninyong at Mr. Yuille's station, commonly known as Ballarat, in such quantity and richness as bade fair to rival the hitherto exhaustless yields of Turonia and California. Great excitement had taken place. Melbourne was deserted. You could not get your hair cut. The barristers were gone, leaving the judges lamenting. The doctors had followed their patients. The clergymen had followed their flocks. The shepherds had deserted theirs. All society existed in a state of dislocation!'

'Now,' he continued, receiving the journal from Ernest, and carefully refolding and returning it to its

place of safety, 'do you see what all this gold breaking out here and there and all about means?'

'For the present the Melbourne people seem to think it means loss, if not ruin, to them. The shepherds have nearly all run away, it seems, as also labourers of every description. The writer anticipates a great fall in the value of property. Indeed, houses and town allotments are considered to be hardly worth holding. I should have thought otherwise myself, but' (here Ernest looked at his companion) 'I begin to doubt the correctness of my own opinions.'

'Well, that writer's an ass, whoever he is; and you're a deal nearer the mark than he is. He's a donkey, that, because their ain't a thistle right against his nose, thinks there ain't no more thistles in the world—let alone corn. Now I've been thinkin' and thinkin' the whole matter over since a friend of mine in Port Phillip sent me this paper, and I cipher it out this way. They've sent down five thousand ounces this week from this place, Ballarat. Then they've struck it at Forest Creek, fifty miles off. Well, that tells me that there's plenty of it, and more than years will see out, judging from California and Turonia, as we know of. Now what do you suppose all Europe—all the world—will do when they hear of this, that you can dig up gold like potatoes? Why, they won't be able to find ships fast enough to bring 'em here. When they do come they'll want to be fed. The tea and sugar and tents and spades and shovels old Paul Frankston and the other merchants will find 'em somehow; the flour the farmers will find them, or if they can't, old Paul and his friends will get it from Chili. *But they can't import beef and mutton.* No; not if meat rose to a shilling a pound. Live stock

is the worst freight in the world, and there's nowhere within boating distance where it grows plentiful as it does here. So when my sum's worked out it means this, that more gold means double and treble the population, and double and treble the price of everything that we have here and want to sell.'

As Mr. Levison paused,—not for breath, for he did not exceed his ordinary slow monotonal enunciation, as he propounded these original and startling ideas much as though he were reading from a book,—Mr. Neuchamp looked fixedly at his guest, as if to discover whether or no some subtle local influence peculiar to Rainbar had infected with speculative mania the shrewd, calm-judging stockholder.

But the *genius loci*, however seductive, would have fared ill in a mental encounter with the slow, sure inferences and iron logic of Abstinens Levison. He displayed no trace of more than ordinary interest. And from all that was apparent, the onward march of a revolution fated to flood the land with wealth and to change a handful of pioneer communities into a nation, was accepted by him with the same faint unmoted surprise as would have been the announcement of a glut in the cattle market or the 'sticking up' of the down-river mail coach.

'That's how it is in my mind,' he slowly continued, as if pursuing his ordinary train of thoughts, 'and before we meet again you'll know all about it. I'm off to Melbourne as soon as I can get on to the mail line. I shall buy stock right and left, and pick up as many cottages and town allotments as I can find with good titles. They'll be like these Freeman store cattle: cent per cent will be a trifle to what profits are to be had

out of them. But all this yarning won't buy the child a frock. Where's that young man of yours? I want to leave my horse and saddle in his charge.'

'Where are you going now?' asked Ernest. 'How can you get over to the mail station without a horse? It's a hundred and eighty miles to Wargan, where the coach line comes in.'

'It's only thirty miles to Wood-duck Lagoon, where the horse mail passes,' said his determined guest. 'I left word for them down at Mingadee to send a led horse by the mailman for me to-morrow. Johnny Daly's an old stockman of mine, and one of those chaps that when he says he'll do a thing he always does it. I'm as sure of finding a horse there at ten o'clock to-morrow as if I saw him now.'

'But suppose he loses him on the way, or don't find your horse ready at Mingadee, what then? Hadn't you better take a man and horse from here?'

'Well, I don't say Johnny would *steal* a horse, out and out, if he knew I expected one at a certain hour; he's a good boy, though he does come from the Weddin Mountains. But he'd *have* one for me, some road or other, if there wasn't one nearer than Bargo Brush. As for your horses, I'm obliged, and know I'm welcome, but it would knock up one going and one coming back, for they're all as poor as crows, and that don't pay, besides a man's time for nothing. I've plenty of time, and the night's the best travelling weather now. If you'll call this native chap I'll be off.'

Ernest, though extremely loath to let his friend and benefactor depart on foot—of which, as a mode of progression, he was beginning to acquire the Australian opinion, viz. that it wore a poverty-stricken appearance



—could not decently oppose Mr. Levison's fixed desire to take the road. He therefore called up Jack Windsor, to whose care Mr. Levison solemnly confided his emaciated quadruped, a much worn and sunburned saddle and bridle, together with a considerable portion of gray blanket, which, in many folds, did duty as saddle-cloth.

'Now, young man,' he said solemnly, walking aside with Mr. Windsor, 'you take care of these and my old horse. Give them to nobody without he brings Mr. Cottonbush's written order: do you hear? That's as good a stock horse and journey hack as ever you crossed, though he's low now.'

'He is *very* low!' averred Jack, looking at the bare-ribbed spectral but well-formed animal that was grazing within a few yards of the spot, 'but he may get over it. I'll take a look at him night and morning, and see that he's lifted regular if he gets down.'

'All right,' said his master. 'I had to lift him myself this morning, and very hard work I had to get him up. But if it rains within the next two months you'll have him kicking up his heels like a colt.'

'Are you going to walk to Wood-duck Lagoon, sir?'

inquired Jack respectfully.

'Yes, I am, and no great matter either,' returned the exceptionally wiry capitalist. '*I'm* right enough; don't you trouble about me. What you and young Banks have to look out for is, to keep all these Circle Dot cattle well within bounds till the weather breaks, and then you can't go wrong, and I look upon Mr. Neuchamp's pile as made. I've taken to him, more than a bit. Besides, he's got another good hack, though he don't know it. I've bought out the Freeman's, stock, lock, and barrel, so their cattle won't bother you any more.'

Here Mr. Windsor gave a leap off the ground, and cast his cabbage-tree hat violently from his curly brown locks in another direction.

‘Yes, I’ve bought ’em pretty right; they didn’t know me, or they’d have stuck it on—bought ’em *for a friend!* So they’ll have the pleasure of seeing you and Banks branding the increase next year, just as they are giving up possession; and the calves will be worth more than I paid for the cows yesterday. But I might be mistaken, you know.’

‘It would be for the first time; so they all used to say at Boocalthra,’ answered Jack.

‘*You* were there, then?’ said Mr. Levison, bending his extremely discriminating gaze upon the bronzed, resolute face. ‘*Now* I remember your brand; you were the curly-headed boy that used to ride the colts for the horse-breaker. Glad you turned out steady. I didn’t expect it. Stick to Rainbar; now you’re in a good place, and you’ll do well. But whatever you do, if you walk your feet off, don’t let these Circle Dot cows and heifers get out of bounds till the rain comes. If you are regularly beat, go down to Mingadee; there’s a hundred and fifty stock horses there, spelling for next winter’s work, and Cottonbush will have my orders to let you have half a dozen. I know what fresh cattle are in a season like this. Well, good-bye, Jack the Devil; I remember all about you now.’ Mr. Windsor grinned, yet preserved an air of diffidence. ‘Take care of the old horse, and don’t you lend that saddle to no one!’

With these parting words tending to thrift, in curious contradistinction to the tenor of his action at Rainbar, Mr. Levison proceeded to take a hurried leave of his entertainer.

‘I’ve just been talking to that native chap of yours,’ he said, ‘about my old horse. He wants a bit of looking after now, but you’d be surprised to see what style he has when he’s in good fettle. Wonderful horse on a camp. Best cutting-out horse, this day, on the river. Pulls rather hard, that’s the worst of him.’

Mr. Neuchamp, who, having as yet not gone through the terrible trials of a prolonged drought, had never witnessed the incredible emaciation to which stock may be reduced, and their rapid and magical transformation at the wand of the enchanter ‘Rain,’ looked as if he really *would* be surprised at the tottering, hollow-eyed, fleshless spectre, in appearance something between an expiring poley cow and an anatomical preparation, ‘pulling hard’ again, or doing any deed of valour as a charger.

‘Ah! you’ll be all in the fashion, then,’ said Mr. Levison, with his customary affirmative expression, which apparently meant that having asserted his opinion it was waste of time to attempt to prove it. ‘When old BI (that’s what the men call him, his name’s written on him pretty big) kicks up his heels, it’ll mean that Rainbar’s *worth twenty thousand pounds!* That’s why I want you to be careful, and not waste your money and get sold up just before the tide turns. How’s that Arab horse-breeding notion turned out? They’d fetch about three pound a head all round just now.’

‘Very well, so far: they’re a little poor, but nothing could look more promising than the yearlings—plenty of bone, and as handsome as you could make them. I should grieve more about their forced sale than anything.’

‘Well, you’re not sold up yet, and won’t be if you’ll be careful and take my advice and Paul Frankston’s.

You mark me, horses will be horses in a year or two. They're hardly worth owning now; but their turn's coming, with everything else that any man will have to sell in Australia for the next ten years.'

Mr. Levison placed the few necessary articles which he had abstracted from his valise, in the moiety of the gray blanket which he had apparently not required as a saddle-cloth. He requested leave to cut off and to take with him a fair-sized section of damper, sternly refusing any other description of edible. Then, turning his face to the broad plain, he held out his hand to Ernest, and finally exhorting him not to waste his money, addressed himself to the far-stretching trail after such a fashion as convinced Ernest that he was no inexperienced pedestrian.

Mr. Neuchamp returned to his cottage in a very different frame of mind from that which characterised his pre-matutinal discipline in the garden. How short a time, how trifling an incident, occasionally suffices to turn the scale from anxiety to repose, from despair to glowing hope. This last cheering mental condition was indispensably necessary to Mr. Neuchamp's acceptance of burdens, even to his very life. He had gone forth in the clear dawnlight a miserable man, racked by presentiments of scorn unalterable to come, gazing on 'Ruin's red letters writ in flame,' and associated with the hitherto untarnished fame and sufficing fortune of Ernest Neuchamp; he had heard in imagination the laugh of scorn, the half-contemptuous, pitying condolence. Now, though much remained uncertain and unsafe, the blessed flower of Hope had recommenced to bloom. Its fragrance was once more shed over the soul of the fainting pilgrim through life's desert, and the wayfarer arose

refreshed and invigorated, free once more to turn his brow erect and undaunted towards the Mecca of his dreams.

This particular morning happened to be that of the bi-weekly post-day, a day to which Mr. Neuchamp had looked forward of late with considerably more apprehension than interest. How wonderfully different, as the years roll on, are the feelings with which that humble messenger of fate, the postman, is greeted! In life's careless spring he is the custodian of friendship's offering, the distributor of the small sweet joys of childhood, the dawning intellectual pleasures of youth, the rose-hued, enchanting flower-tokens of love. As the days of the years of our pilgrimage roll on, 'the air is full of farewells to the dying and mournings for the dead.' How altered is the character of the missives which lie motionless, but charged with subtle, terrible forces!—electric agents they!—thrilling or rending the vital frame from that overcharged battery, the heart!

To this undesirable tenor and complexion had much of Mr. Neuchamp's correspondence, drought-leavened and gloomy, arrived. Many of his smaller accounts were of necessity left unpaid. The cruel season, unchanged in the more vital characteristic of periodic moisture, seemed to be culminating in an apparently fixed and fatal determination on the part of Messrs. Oldstile and Crampton to let him have no more money on account.

But several minor matters, on this particular day, besides the visit of Mr. Levison, seemed to point to Fortune's more indulgent mood. The pile of letters and papers was pleasantly, if not hopefully, variegated by those periodicals and peculiarly stamped envelopes which denote the delivery of the European mail. Upon these

Ernest dashed with unconcealed eagerness, and tearing open a letter in his brother Courtenay's delicate Italian handwriting, utterly devoid of linear emphasis, read as follows :

NEUCHAMPSTEAD, 6th March 18—.

DEAR ERNEST—I cannot acknowledge surprise at the contents of your last letter, having always looked for some such ending to your colonial adventure. The day of success for such enterprises has gone by—if indeed *any one* ever was really successful at any time in such wanderings and Quixotisms. You quote the greater examples. Yet a little temporary notoriety, chiefly ending in imprisonment or the block, was the guerdon of Columbus and one Raleigh, instances which occur to me. As I have said before, I have no doubt that our family would have substantially benefited by remaining on their paternal fiords and leaving Normandy and England to the robbers and hangers-on who followed the popular pirate of the day. Being in England, I suppose we shall have to stay, though the climate daily recommends itself less to any one whose epidermis does not resemble a suit of armour. The crops have been bad this year. The tenants are slow and deficient. No one seems to have any money except certain Liverpool or Manchester persons, born with an aptitude for swindling in 'gray shirtings,' cotton twist, racehorses, or other equally plausible instrument for gambling. I spend little and risk nothing. So I may hope to survive in my insignificance, unless the grand Radical earthquake, which will surely swallow England's aristocracy of birth and culture in a coming day, be antedated. All men of family who dabble in agriculture, commerce, or colonisation, are earthen pots which must inevitably be shattered by the aggressive flotilla of brazen vessels which encumbers every tide nowadays. You will admit I had no expectation of other result than your ruin when you embarked. In announcing that fact spare me the details. You will find your old rooms ready at Neuchampstead, and re-furnished. I have been extravagant in some curious antique furniture.

I enclose a draft for three thousand pounds. Such a sum is of no use to a gentleman in England. Fling it after the rest. It may console you, years hence, when you are adding Australian pollen masses to the famous collection of orchids for which *alone* Neuchampstead is celebrated, that your experiment had full justice.



It is only the bourgeois who leaves the table before his 'system' is fairly tried.—Good-bye, my dear brother. Yours sincerely,  
COURTENAY NEUCHAMP.

P.S.—I forgot to add that I gave Augusta your message. How could you be so incautious? I would have suppressed it, but had, of course, no option. She starts for Sydney by the mail steamer. Are the women in Australia so obstinate? But they are much the same everywhere, I apprehend.—C. N.

The first emotion which Mr. Neuchamp experienced after reading this characteristic letter was one of unqualified delight. The sight of the draft for the three thousand pounds, so slightly alluded to by Courtenay, was as the vision of the palm-trees at the well to the fainting desert pilgrim, of the distant sail to the gaunt, perishing seaman on the drifting raft—the symbol of blessed hope, of assured deliverance. The capital sum, or the trifling annual income derivable from it, in gold-flooded England, might be of little utility there, as Courtenay had averred with the humorous indifferentism which he professed. But *here*, in this rich unwatered level, metaphorically and otherwise, it was like the river-born trickling tunnels with which, since forgotten Pharaoh days, the toiling fellaheen saturate the black gaping Nile gardens, sure precursor of profound vegetation and the hundred-fold increase.

No use to a gentleman in England! A company of guardian angels must surely have wafted to him the precious, delicate document across the seas, across the desert here. What use would it not be to him, Ernest? It would pay in full for the Circle Dot store cattle, also for those purchased from Freeman Brothers, leaving a balance to the credit of his account with those treasure-guarding griffins, Oldstile and Crampton. Besides, the

bills due to Levison for the store cattle were not due for several months yet. In the meantime rain or other wonders might happen. The young horses, too, children of Omar, fleet son of the desert, with delicately-formed aristocratic heads, deerlike limbs, which had been dear to him almost as their ancestors had been to some lonely subdivision of the wandering Shammar or Aneezah!—they were saved from ruin and disgrace—saved from the indignity of passing for the merest trifle into the possession of unheeding vulgar purchasers, who would probably stigmatise them as weeds, wanting in bone, or by any other cheap form of ignorant depreciation.

Saved! saved! saved! All was saved. Once more secure. Once more his own. Once more the land and the grazing herd, the humble abode, the garden, the paddock, even the long-neglected but not despaired-of canal, all the acted resolves and outcome of a sincere but perhaps over-sanguine mind, dearer than ever were they to him, their author and projector. They were his own again. How like Courtenay, too! Ever better than his word; incredulous as to improved benefits and successes; deprecating haste, risk, imprudence; doubtful of all but the garnered grain, the assayed gold, the concrete and the absolute in life,—but, in the hour of need, sparing of that counsel which is but another name for reproach, stanch in aid, generous alike in the mode and measure of his gift.

Having recovered from this natural exaltation and relief at the unexpected succour, Mr. Neuchamp turned to the consideration of the very important postscript of his brother's letter with apprehension.

Had his cousin, Miss Augusta Neuchamp, really sailed and arrived in Sydney, as would appear? If so, where

was she to go? What was he to do? She could hardly come to Rainbar to take up her abode in this small cottage, which, though possessing several rooms, was, like many dwellings in the bush proper, practically undivided as to sound; the conversation of any one, in any given room, being equally beneficial and entertaining to the occupant of any other. Then there was not a woman upon the whole establishment. The wives and daughters of the Freemans, even if the latter were eligible for ladies' maids, were little less than hostile.

A residence in Sydney seemed the only possible plan; but he knew his cousin too well to think that there would be no drawback to that arrangement. Energetic, well-intentioned, possessing a clear available intelligence, and considerable mental force, when exercised within certain well-defined, but it must be confessed narrow limits, Augusta Neuchamp was a benevolent despot in her own way. She ardently desired to arrange the destinies of the classes or individuals who came within the sphere of her action in accordance with what *she* considered to be the plain intentions of Providence with regard to them. Of the tremendous issues involved in such a translation, she had no conception. Plain to bluntness in her speech, she rarely evaded the awkwardness of expressing disappointment. Unquestionably refined by habit and education, she possessed little imagination and less tact. Thus she rarely failed to provide herself, in any locality which she honoured with her presence, with a large and increasing supply of opponents, if not of enemies. A moderate private income enabled her to indulge her tastes for improving herself or others. Possessing no very near relatives, she was uncontrolled as to her movements and mode of life. She had reached the age of twenty-five,

though by no means unprepossessing in appearance, without finding any suitor sufficiently valorous to adopt or oppose, in the character of a husband, her very clearly expressed views of life. Had she consented to reserve a modification in these important respects, her friends averred that she might have been 'settled' ere now. But such palterings with principle were alien and abhorrent to the nature of Augusta Neuchamp. And Augusta Neuchamp she had accordingly remained.

The appearance of Miss Neuchamp was generally described as commanding, although she was slightly, if at all, over the medium height of woman. But there was an expression about her high-bridged aquiline nose and compressed lips which left no one in doubt as to the fact that, in controversy or contending action, the first to yield would *not* be the possessor of those features. Her clear blue eyes would have been handsome had there been a shade of doubt or softness at any time visible. Such a moment of feminine weakness never came. They looked at you and through you and over you, but never fell in maiden doubt or fear beneath your gaze. Two courses were open to the individual of the conflicting sex in her presence—unconditional surrender or flight.

It was hard, Ernest thought, that just as he was relieved from one anxiety he should be provided by unkind Fate with another. He revolved the imminent question of the disposition of Miss Augusta Neuchamp in his mind until prevented by mutual apprehension from pursuing the terribly perplexing subject. Of all people in the wide world, he thought his cousin was the most impracticable, the most unyielding to argument, the most certain to expose herself to dislike and ridicule in Australia. She knew everything. She believed nothing,

unless indeed it related to herself or proceeded directly from that source. Everything which differed from her stereotyped system was wrong, ruinous, degenerate, or provincial. How she would criticise the place, the people, the climate, the railways, the houses, the fences, the workmen, the men and the women, the grass, and the gum-trees!

If he could only persuade her to take lodgings in Sydney, until he could go down and argue the point with her, much might be gained. Antonia Frankston would visit her, and harder than adamant must she be if that gentle voice and natural manner did not convert her to a favourable opinion of Australian life.

No such preparatory process was possible. A letter arrived from the fair emigrant which left no doubt of her immediate intentions. It ran thus:

DEAR COUSIN ERNEST—I have dared the perils of the deep, not the least for your sake, but *me voici*. I made a short stay in Sydney, but being extremely tired of the dust and mosquitoes, I decided upon the course of travelling by rail and coach to your far-away estate at once. [Here Ernest groaned, a suspicious sound which might have been in sympathy for the trials of a lonely if not distressed damsel, or an expression of despondency at the idea of his own inevitable cares and anxieties, such as must attend the entertainment of the first lady-guest ever seen at Rainbar. He continued the reading of the epistle.] If Sydney had been a more interesting place I might have lingered for a week or two so as to exchange letters with you. Had it possessed that foreign air which one finds so pleasant in many continental spots, otherwise dull enough, I could have amused myself. But being, as it is, a second-hand copy of a provincial British town—I grant you the botanical element is lovely, though neglected—I could not endure another week. I seemed to long for the desert, in all its vastness and grandeur, where your abode is placed. It was like staying in an Algerian town, a dwarfed and dirty Paris, full of *cafés* and shabby Frenchmen playing at dominoes. I had no lady acquaintances.

There *are* a few, I suppose. So I grew desperate, and took my passage through the agency company; Cobb, I think, is the name. If you have no phaeton or dogcart available, you might bring 'a saddle-horse for me.—Your affectionate cousin,

AUGUSTA NEUCHAMP.

Just after the perusal of this letter, which showed that Miss Neuchamp's angles still stood out as sharply as those of a Theban obelisk—the voyage and change of sky notwithstanding—Mr. Neuchamp was startled by the sudden appearance of Piambook, who rushed into his presence with an air of sincere discomposure very different from that of his usual unimpressible demeanour. His rolling dark eyes gleamed—his features worked—his mouth, slightly open, could only articulate the borrowed phrase of his conquerors, 'My word! my word!' It was for some moments the only sound that could be extracted from him by Ernest's inquiries.

'What is it, Piambook?' at length demanded Ernest, so decidedly, almost fiercely, that his sable retainer capitulated.

'Me look out longa wheelbarrow,' he explained at length. He had been despatched to a distant point of the run at a very early hour of the morning.

'Well, what did you see?' pursued his master. 'You can yabber fast enough when you like.'

'That one wheelbarrow plenty broket,' explained the observing pre-Adamite. 'Mine see um longa plain—plenty sit down—liket three fellow wheel. Billy Robinson, he go longa township.'

'Well, what then? the coach broke down; that's not wonderful—passengers walked, I suppose.'

'Me secum that one white-fellow gin,' quoth Piambook, in a low, mysterious voice. Then, bursting into



an immoderate fit of laughter, he continued, 'That one carry liket spyglass.' Here he placed his thumb and forefinger, circularly contracted, to his eye, and, gazing at Mr. Neuchamp, again laughed till his dusky orbs were dim.

Mr. Neuchamp at once comprehended by this pantomime the gold eyeglass which Miss Augusta, partially short-sighted, habitually wore; and becoming uneasy as to her state and condition under the circumstances of a presumed breakdown, asked eagerly of his follower what she was doing.

'That one sit along a wheelbarrow, liket this one;' here he took up a book from Ernest's table and pretended to look into it with great and absorbed interest.

'Anybody in the coach, Piambook?'

'One fellow Chinaman,' returned the messenger, with cool indifference.

After this information Mr. Neuchamp at once perceived that no time must be lost. Augusta could not be left a moment longer than was necessary, sitting in a disabled coach in the midst of a boundless plain, with a Chinaman for her *vis-à-vis*. What a situation for a young lady to whom Baden was as familiar as Brompton, Paris as Piccadilly, Rome, Florence, Venice, as the stations on the Eastern Counties Railway! He did not believe she was afraid. She was afraid of nothing. But the situation was embarrassing.

The hawk-eyed Piambook had descried the stranded coach—the wheelbarrow, as his comrades called it—on the mail track, about a mile off his path of duty. It was full twelve miles from Rainbar. In a quarter of an hour the express waggon with two cheerful but enfeebled steeds stumbled and blundered along at a very different

pace from that of Mr. Parklands, when he rattled up Ernest to the Rainbar door, on the occasion of their first memorable drive.

However, the distance from home was luckily short, and in about two hours Mr. Neuchamp arrived at the spot where, in the disabled coach, sat Miss Augusta Neuchamp, possessing her soul in *impatience*, and gradually coming to the conclusion that Ah Ling—who sat stolidly staring at her and regretting the loss of time which might have been spent in watering his garden or smoking opium, the only two occupations he ever indulged in—was about to rob and perhaps murder her. As she always carried a small revolver, and was by no means ignorant of its use, it is possible that Ah Ling was in greater danger than he was aware of. His fair neighbour would infallibly have shot him had he made any hasty or incautious motion.

When Mr. Neuchamp rumbled up in his useful but not imposing vehicle, a slight shade of satisfaction overspread her features.

‘Oh, Ernest, I am delighted to see you; however did you find out my position? Don’t you think it was inexcusable of the coach company to send us all this way in a damaged vehicle? I thought all your coaching arrangements were so perfect.’

‘Accidents will happen, my dear Augusta,’ said Ernest, ‘in all companies and communities, you know. Cobb and Co. are the best of fellows in the main. But *whatever* induced you to come up into this wild place without writing to me first? Have you not suffered all kinds of hardship and disagreeables?’

‘Well, perhaps a few; but I knew all about the country from some books I read on the voyage out. I

studied the directory till I found out the coach lines, and I should not have complained but for this last blunder. But what a barren wilderness this all seems. I thought Australia was a land of rich pastures.'

'So it is—but this is a drought. "And the famine was sore in the land." You remember that in the Bible, don't you? We are a good deal like Palestine in our periodical lean years, except that they didn't import their flour from beyond sea, and we do.'

'But this looks so very bad!' said she, putting up her eyeglass and staring earnestly at the waste lands of the crown, which certainly presented a striking contrast to the Buckinghamshire meadows or uplands either. 'Why, it seems all sand and these scrubby-looking bushes; are you sure you haven't made a mistake and bought inferior land? A gentleman who came out with me said inexperienced persons often did.'

'My dear Augusta,' said Ernest, quelling a well-remembered feeling of violent antagonism, 'you must surely have forgotten that I have been more than two years in Australia, and may be supposed to know the difference between good country and bad by this time.'

'Do you?' said his fair cousin indifferently. 'Well, you must have improved. Courtenay says you are the most credulous person he knows; and as for Aunt Ermengarde, she says that, of all the failures the family has produced——'

'Please to spare me the old lady's review of my life and times,' said Ernest, waking up his bounding steeds. 'We never did agree, and it can serve no good purpose to further embitter my remembrance of her.'

'Oh, but she did not wish to say anything really disparaging of you, only that you were not of sufficiently

coarse material to win success in farming, or trade, or politics.'

'Or colonisation, my dear Augusta. Perhaps she was not so far wrong, after all; but somehow one doesn't like to be told these things, and I must ask you and Aunt Ermengarde to suspend your judgment until the last scene of the third act. Then you will be able to applaud, or otherwise, on correct grounds. I think you will find the country and its ways by no means too easy to comprehend.'

'I expect nothing, simply, so I cannot be disappointed. It seems to me a sort of provincial England jumbled up with one's ideas of Mexico.'

'And the people?'

'I haven't noticed them much yet. I thought many of the women ridiculously overdressed in Sydney, copying our English fashions in a semi-tropical climate. I left everything behind except a few tourist suits.'

'And most extraordinary you look,' thought Ernest to himself, though he dared not say so, mentally contrasting the stern Augusta's dust-coloured tusser wrap, broad-leafed hat with green lining, rather stout boots, short dress, and flattened down hair, with Antonia, cool, glistening, delicately robed, and rose-fresh amid the bright-hued shrubberies of Morahmee, or even the Misses Middleton, perfectly *comme il faut*, on shipboard, in George Street, or at the station, as everybody ought to be, thought Ernest—unless she is an eccentric reformer, he was just about to say, but refrained. Was any one else of his acquaintance going to do wonders in the alleviation and reformation of the Australian world? and if so, what had *he* accomplished? Had he not been in scores of instances self-convicted of the most egregious

mistakes and miscalculations? After all his experience, was he not now indebted almost for his financial existence to certain of these very colonists whose intelligence he had formerly held so cheap?

These reflections were not suffered to proceed to an inconvenient length, being routed by the clear and not particularly musical tones of Miss Augusta's voice.

'I can't say much for Australian horses, so far, Ernest. I expected to see the fleet courser of the desert, and all that kind of thing. These seem wretched underbred creatures, and miserably poor.'

'Lives there the man, with soul so dead,' who doesn't mind hearing his horses run down?

'They are not bad horses, by any means, though low in condition, owing to this dreadful season,' answered Ernest, rather quickly. 'This one,' touching the off-side steed, 'is as good and fast and high-couraged a horse as ever was saddled or harnessed, but they have had nothing to eat for six months, to speak of. So they quite surpass the experience of the cabman's horse in *Pickwick*; and I can't afford to buy corn at a pound a bushel.'

'I forgot about the horse in *Pickwick*,' said Augusta, who, a steady reader in her own line, which she denominated 'useful,' had little appreciation of humour, and never could be got to know the difference between *Pickwick* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Charles O'Malley* and *The Knight of Gwynne*. 'But surely more neatness in harness and turn-out might be managed,' and she looked at the dusty American harness and rusty bits.

'You must remember, my dear Augusta, that you are not only in the provinces, but in the far far Bush, now—akin to the Desert—in more ways than one. I don't

suppose the Sheik Abdallah turns out with very bright bits; but, if he does, he has the advantage of us in the labour supply. We are compelled to economise rigidly in that way.'

'You seem compelled to economise in every way that makes life worth having,' said his downright kinswoman. 'Does any one ever make any money at all here to compensate for the savage life you seem to lead?'

'Well, a few people do,' replied Ernest, half amused, half annoyed. 'If we had time to visit a little, not perhaps in this neighbourhood, I could show you places well kept and pretty enough, and people who would be voted fairly provided for even in England.'

'I have seen none as yet,' said Miss Neuchamp; 'but I believe much of the prosperity in the large towns is unreal. I met a very pleasant, gentlemanlike man in Sydney, in fact one of the few gentlemen I did see there—a Mr. Croker, I think, was his name—who said it was all outside show, and that nobody had made any money in this colony, or ever would.'

'Oh, Jernyn Croker,' said Ernest, laughing; 'you must not take him literally; he is a profound cynic, and must have been sent into the world expressly to counter-balance an equally pronounced optimist, myself for instance. That's his line of humour, and very amusing it is—in its way.'

'But does he not speak the truth?' inquired the literal Augusta; 'or is it not considered necessary in a colony?'

'Of course he *intends* to do so, but like all men whose opinions are very strongly coloured by their individualism, which again is dominated by purely physical occurrences, such as bile, indigestion, and so on, he



unconsciously takes a gloomy, depreciatory view of matters in general, which I, and perhaps others, think untrue and misleading.'

'I believe in a right and a wrong about everything myself,' said the young lady, 'but I must say I feel inclined to agree with him so far.'

Ernest was on the point of asking her how she could possibly know, when the turrets of Rainbar appearing in sight, the conversation was diverted to that 'hold' and its surroundings, the danger of arriving in the midst of an altercation being thereby averted.

'Allow me to welcome you to my poor home,' said Mr. Neuchamp, driving up to the door of the cottage, and assisting her to alight. 'I wish I had had notice of the honour of your visit, that we might have been suitably prepared.'

'Stuff!' said Miss Augusta. 'Then you would have written to prevent me coming at all. I was determined to see how you were *really* getting on, and I never allow trifling discomforts to stand in the way of my resolves.'

'I am aware of *that*, my dear Augusta,' replied Mr. Neuchamp, with a slight mental shrug, in which he decided that the trifling discomforts alluded to occasionally involved others besides the heroine herself. 'But can you do without a maid? I am afraid there is not a woman on the place.'

'That's a little awkward,' confessed Miss Neuchamp. 'I did not quite anticipate such a barrack-room state of matters. But is there none at the village, or whatever it is called, in the neighbourhood?'

'I have a village on the run, I am sorry to say; but though we are at feud with the villagers, I did attempt

to procure you a handmaid, and I will see what has been done.'

It was yet early in the day. Miss Neuchamp, being put into possession of the best bedroom, hastily arranged for her use and benefit, was told to consider herself as the sole occupant of the cottage for the present. Mr. Neuchamp in the meanwhile having ordered lunch, went over to the barracks to see if Mr. Banks had returned. He had been sent upon an embassy of great importance and diplomatic delicacy: no less, indeed, than to prevail upon Mrs. Abraham Freeman to permit her eldest daughter, Tottie, a girl of seventeen, to come to Rainbar during the period of Miss Neuchamp's stay, to attend upon that lady as housemaid, lady's maid, and general attendant. He was empowered to make any reasonable promises to provide the girl with everything she might want, short of a husband, but to bring her up if it could possibly be done. For, of course, Ernest was duly sensible of the extreme awkwardness that would result from the presence of Miss Neuchamp—albeit a near relative—as the sole representative of womanhood at such an essentially bachelor settlement as Rainbar.

Tottie Freeman, who had commenced to bloom in the comparatively desert air of Rainbar, was a damsel not altogether devoid of youthful charms. True, the unfriendly sun, the scorching blasts, together with the culpable disuse of veil or bonnet, had combined to embrown what ought to have been her complexion, and, worse again, to implant such a crop of freckles upon her face, neck, and arms, that she looked as if a bran-bag had been shaken over her naturally fair skin.

Now that we have said the worst of her, it must be admitted that her figure was very good, well developed,

upright, and elastic. She could run as fast as any of her brothers, carrying a tolerable weight, and (when no one was looking) vault on her ambling mare, which she could ride with or without a saddle over range or river, logs, scrub, or reed-beds, just as well as they could. She could intimidate a half-wild cow with a roping pole, and milk her afterwards; drive a team on a pinch, and work all day in the hot sun. With all this there was nothing unfeminine or unpleasing to the eye in the bush maiden. Quite the contrary, indeed. She was a handsome young woman as regards features, form, and carriage. Cool and self-possessed, she was by no means as reckless of speech as many better educated persons of her sex; and though she liked a little flirtation—‘which most every girl expex’—there was not a word to be said to her detriment ‘up or down the river,’ which comprehended the whole of her social system.

Such was the damsel whom Charley Banks had been despatched to capture by force, fraud, or persuasion for the use and benefit of Miss Augusta Neuchamp. A less suitable ambassador might have been selected. Charley Banks was a very good-looking young fellow, and had always risked a little badinage when brought into contact with Miss Tottie and her family. War had been formally declared between the houses of Neuchamp and Freeman, yet Ernest, as was his custom, had always been unaffectedly polite and kindly to the women of the tribe, young and old.

Therefore Mrs. Freeman had no strong ill-feeling towards him, and Miss Tottie was extremely sorry that they never saw Mr. Neuchamp riding up to the door now, with a pleasant good-morrow, sometimes chatting for a quarter of an hour, when the old people were out

of the way. When Charley Banks first asked Mrs. Freeman to let her daughter go as a great favour to Mr. Neuchamp, and afterwards inflamed Tottie's curiosity by descriptions of the great wealth and high fashion of Miss Neuchamp (who had a dray-load of dresses, straight from London and Paris, coming up next week), he found the fort commencing to show signs of capitulation. At first Mrs. Freeman 'couldn't spare Tottie if it was ever so.' Then Tottie 'couldn't think of going among a parcel of young fellows, and only one lady in the place.' Then Mrs. Freeman 'might be able to manage for a week or two, though what Abe would say when he came home and found his girl gone to Rainbar, she couldn't say.' Then Tottie 'wouldn't mind trying for a week or two.' She supposed 'nobody would run away with her, and it must be awfully lonely for the lady all by herself.' Besides, 'she hadn't seen a soul lately, and was moped to death; perhaps a little change would do her good.' So the 'treaty of Rainbar,' between the high contracting personages, resolved itself into this, that Tottie was to have ten shillings a week for a month's service, if Miss Neuchamp stayed so long, was to obey all her lawful commands, and to make herself 'generally useful.'

'So if you'll be kind enough to run in the mare, Mr. Banks—she's down on the flat there, and not very flash, you may be sure—I'll get my habit on, and mother will send up my things with Billy in the evening. Here's my bridle.'

Having stated the case thus briefly, Miss Freeman retired into a remarkably small bedroom which she shared with two younger sisters and a baby-brother, to make the requisite change of raiment, while Charley Banks ran into the stockyard and caught the varmint,

ambling black mare, which he knew very well by sight. As he led her up to the hut Miss Tottie came out, carrying her saddle in one hand and holding up her alpaca habit with the other. She promptly placed it upon the black mare's back, buckled the girths, and touching the stirrup with her foot, gave a spring which seated her firmly in the saddle, and the black mare dashed off at an amble which was considerably faster than a medium trot.

'What a brute that mare of yours is to amble, Tottie,' said Mr. Banks, slightly out of breath; 'can't you make her go a more Christian pace? Come, let's have a spin.'

'All right,' said the girl, going off at speed, and sitting down to her work, 'but it must be a very short one; my mare is as weak as a cat, and I suppose your horse isn't much better.'

'He's as strong as nothing to eat three times a day can make him. So pull up as soon as you like. I say, Tottie, I'm awfully glad you've come up this time to help us with our lady. It was first-rate of your mother to let you come. Fancy Miss Neuchamp coming up in the coach by herself from Sydney!'

'Why shouldn't she? I wish I had the chance of going down by myself—wouldn't I take it—quick? But I say, Mr. Banks, what am I to do when I get there? I shall be so frightened of the lady. And I never was in service before.'

'Oh, you must take it easy, you know,' commenced Mr. Banks, in a very clear explanation-to-a-child sort of way. 'Do everything she tells you, always say "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," and be a good girl all round. I've seen you *look* awfully good sometimes, Tottie, you know.'

'Oh, nonsense, Mr. Banks,' said the nut-brown maid,

blushing through her southern-tinted skin in a very visible manner. 'I'm no more than others, I expect. What shall I have to do, though?'

'Well, a good deal of nothing, I should say. You'll sleep in the room I used to have, next to hers; for you'll be in the cottage all by yourselves all night. You'll have to sweep and dust, and wash for Miss Neuchamp, and wait at table. The rest of the time you'll have to hang it out the best way you can. You mustn't quarrel with old Johnnie, the cook, or else he'll go away and leave us all in the bush. He's a cross old ruffian, but he *can* cook.'

'I wonder if it will be very dull—but it won't be for long, will it, Mr. Banks?'

'Dull? don't think of it. Won't there be me and Jack Windsor, and an odd traveller to talk to. Besides, Jack's a great admirer of yours, isn't he, Tottie?'

'Not he,' quoth the damsel, with decision; 'there's some girl down the country that he thinks no end of; besides, father and he don't get on well,' added Miss Tottie, with much demureness.

'Oh, that don't signify,' said Mr. Banks authoritatively. 'Jack's a good fellow, and will be overseer here some day; you go in and cut down the other girl. He said you were the best-looking girl on the river last Sunday.'

'Oh, you go on,' said Tottie, playing with the bridle rein, and again making her mare run up to the top of her exceptional pace, so that further playful conversation by Mr. Banks was restricted by his lack of breath.

As they approached the Rainbar homestead Tottie slackened this aggravating pace (which resembles what



Americans call 'racking or pacing'—it is natural to many Australian horses, though of course capable of development by education), and in a somewhat awe-stricken tone inquired, 'Is she a *very* grand lady, indeed, Mr. Banks?'

'Well, she'll be dressed plainly, of course,' said Charley. 'The dust's enough to spoil anything above a gunnybag after all this dry weather. Her things are coming up, as I told you, but you never saw any one with half the breeding before. You were a little girl when you came here, Tottie; did you ever see a real lady in your life, now?'

'I saw Mrs. Jones, of Yamboola, down the country,' said Tottie doubtfully. 'Father sent me up one day with some fresh butter.'

'I wish he'd send you up with some now,' said Charley, who hadn't heard of butter or milk for six months. 'Mrs. Jones is pretty well, but think of Miss Neuchamp's pedigree. Her great-grandmother's *great-grandmother* was a grand lady, and lived in a castle, and so on, for five hundred years back, and all the same for nearly a thousand. I saw it all in an old book of Mr. Neuchamp's one day, about the history of their county.'

'Lor!' said Tottie, 'how nice! Why, she must be like the imported filly we saw at Wargan Races last year. Oh, wasn't she a real beauty? such legs! and such a sweet head on her!—I never saw the like of it!'

'You're a regular Currency lass, Tottie,' laughed Mr. Banks; 'always thinking about horses. Don't you tell Miss Neuchamp that she's very sweet about the head and has out-and-out legs: she mightn't understand it. Here we are—jump down. I'll put the mare in the paddock.'

Miss Neuchamp, having had time to finish luncheon, had walked out into the verandah with her cousin, when she was attracted by the trampling of horses, and looked forth in time to see her proposed handmaid sail up to the door at a pace which would have excited observation in Rotten Row.

Mr. Banks awaited her dismounting, knowing full well that she required no assistance. The active maiden swung herself sideways on the saddle and dropped to the ground as lightly as the 'bounding beauty of Bessarabia,' or any ordinary circus sawdust-treading celebrity. Lifting her habit, she advanced to the verandah with a curious mixture of shyness and self-possession. She successfully accomplished the traditional courtesy to Miss Neuchamp, and then shook hands cordially with Ernest, as she had been in the habit of doing. Miss Augusta put up her eyeglass at this, and regarded the 'young person' with a fixed and critical gaze.

'I'm very much obliged to your mother for letting you come, Tottie, and I am very glad to see you at Rainbar,' said Mr. Neuchamp. 'If you go into the dining-room, you will find the lunch on the table; I daresay you will have an appetite after your ride. You can clear it away by and by, and Miss Neuchamp will tell you anything she wishes you to do. You will live in the cottage, and you must help old Johnny as well as you can, without quarrelling with him—you know his temper—or letting him bully you.'

Tottie was about to say, 'I'm not afraid of the old tinker,' but, remembering Mr. Banks's advice, replied meekly, 'Yes, sir; thank you, Mr. Neuchamp,' and retired to her lunch and duties.

‘I suppose that is a sample of your peasantry,’ said Miss Neuchamp, with cold preciseness of tone. ‘Do you generally shake hands with your housemaids in the colonies? I suppose it must be looked for in a democracy.’

‘Well, Tottie Freeman isn’t exactly a peasant,’ explained Ernest mildly. ‘We haven’t any of the breed here. She is a farmer’s daughter, and her proud sire has or had an acreage that would make him a great man at fair and market in England. You will find her a good-tempered, honest girl, not afraid of work, as we say here, and as she is your only possible attendant, you must make the best of her.’

‘Is she to join us at table?’ inquired Miss Neuchamp, with the same fixed air of indifference. ‘Of course I only ask for information.’

‘She will fare as we do, but will take her refection after we have completed ours. She cannot very well be sent to the kitchen.’

‘Why not?’ demanded Miss Augusta.

‘For reasons which will be apparent to you, my dear Augusta, after your longer stay in Australia. But principally because there are only men there at present, and our old cook is not a suitable companion for a young girl.’

‘Very peculiar household arrangements,’ said Miss Neuchamp, ‘but I suppose I shall comprehend in time.’

## CHAPTER XXV

HAVING communicated this sentiment in a tone which did not conduce to the lighter graces of conversation, Miss Neuchamp resumed her reading. Silence, the ominous oppressive silence of those who do not wish to speak, reigned unbroken for a while.

At length, lifting her head as if the thought had suddenly struck her, she said, 'I cannot think why you did not buy a station nearer to town, where you might have lived in a comparatively civilised way.'

'For the very sufficient reasons that there is never so much money to be made at comfortable, highly improved stations, and the areas of land are invariably smaller.'

'Then you have come to regard money as everything? Is this the end of the burning philanthropy, and all that sort of thing?'

'You are too quick in your conclusions, my dear Augusta,' replied Mr. Neuchamp, somewhat hurt. 'It is necessary, I find, to make some money to ensure the needful independence of position without which philanthropical or other projects can scarcely be carried out.'

'I daresay you will end in becoming a mere colonist, and marrying a colonial girl, after all your fine ideas. I

suppose there are some a shade more refined than this one.'

Mr. Neuchamp stood aghast—words failed him. Augusta went on quietly reading her book. She failed to perceive the avalanche which was gathering above her head.

'My dear Augusta,' he said at length, with studied calmness, 'it is time that some of your misconceptions should be cleared away. Let me recall to you that you were only a few days in a hotel in Sydney before you started on your journey to this distant and comparatively rude district. If you had acted reasonably, and remained in Sydney to take advantage of introductions to my friends, you would have had some means of making comparisons after seeing Australian ladies. But with your present total ignorance of the premises, I wonder that a well-educated woman should be so illogical as to state a conclusion.'

'Well, perhaps I am a little premature,' conceded Miss Augusta, whose temper was much under command. 'I suppose there is a wonderful young lady at the back of all this indignation. Mr. Croker said as much. I must wait and make her acquaintance. I wish you all sorts of happiness, Ernest. Now I must go and look after the *other* young lady.'

When Miss Neuchamp returned to the dining-room she perceived that the damsel whose social status was so difficult to define had finished her mid-day meal, and had also completed the clearing off and washing up of the various articles of the service. She had discovered for herself the small room used as a pantry, had ferreted out the requisite cloths and towels, and procured hot water from the irascible Johnny. She had extemporised

a table in the passage, and was just placing the last of the articles on their allotted shelves with much deftness and celerity, when Miss Neuchamp entered. Her riding-skirt lay on a chair, and she had donned a neat print frock, which she had brought strapped to the saddle.

‘I was coming to give you instructions,’ said Miss Neuchamp, ‘but I see you have anticipated me by doing everything which I should have asked you to do, and very nicely too. What is your name?’

‘Mary Anne Freeman,’ said Tottie demurely.

‘I thought I heard Mr. Neuchamp address you by some other Christian name,’ said Miss Neuchamp, with slight severity of aspect.

‘Oh, Tottie,’ said the girl carelessly; ‘every one calls me Tottie, or Tot; suppose it’s for shortness.’

‘I shall call you Mary Anne,’ said Miss Neuchamp with quiet decision; ‘and now, Mary Anne, are you accustomed to the use of the needle? do you like sewing?’

‘Well, I don’t *like* it,’ she replied ingenuously, ‘but of course I can sew a little; we have to make our own frocks and the children’s things at home.’

‘Very proper and necessary,’ affirmed Augusta; ‘if we can get the material I will superintend your making a couple of dresses for yourself, which perhaps you will think an improvement in pattern on the one you wear.’

‘Oh, I should *so* like to have a new pattern,’ said Tottie, with feminine satisfaction. ‘There’s plenty of nice prints in the store; I’ll speak to Mr. Banks about it, mem.’

‘I will arrange that part of it,’ said Miss Neuchamp. ‘In the meanwhile I’ll point out your bedroom, which you can put in order as well as mine for the night.’



After the first day or two Miss Neuchamp, though occasionally shocked at the Australian girl's ignorance of that portion of the Church Catechism which exhorts people to behave 'lowly and reverently to all their betters,' was pleased with the intelligence and artless good-humour of her attendant. She was sufficiently acute to discriminate between the genuine respect which the girl exhibited to her, 'a real lady,' and the mere lip service and servility too often yielded by the English poor, from direct compulsion of grinding poverty and sore need. She discovered that Tottie was quick and teachable in the matter of needlework, so that, having been stimulated by the alluring expectation of 'patterns,' she worked readily and creditably.

For a few days Miss Neuchamp managed to employ and interest herself not altogether unpleasantly. Ernest, of course, betook himself off to some manner of station work immediately after breakfast, returning, if possible, to lunch. This interval Miss Neuchamp filled up in great measure by means of her correspondence, which was voluminous and various of direction, ranging from her Aunt Ermengarde, a conscientious but ruthless conservative, to philosophical acquaintances whom she had met in her travels, and who, like her, had much ado to fill up those leisure hours of which their lives were chiefly composed. This portion of the day also witnessed Tottie's most arduous labours, to which she addressed herself with great zeal and got through her work, as she termed it, so as to attire herself becomingly and wait at table.

In the afternoon Ernest went out for walking excursions to such points of interest, neither many nor picturesque, as the neighbourhood supplied. There was a certain 'bend' or curving reach of the river where, from

a lofty bluff, the red walls of which the rushing tide had channelled for ages, a striking and uncommon view was obtained. The vast plain, here diversified by the giant eucalypti which fringed the winding watercourse, stretched limitless to the horizon. But all was apparently barren from Dan to Beersheba. The reed-beds were trampled and eaten down to the last cane. The soft rich alluvium in which they grew was cracked, yet hard as a brickfield. How different from the swaying emerald billows with feathered tasselled crests which other summers had seen there! Something of this sort had Ernest endeavoured to explain to Miss Neuchamp when she spoke disrespectfully of the trodden cloddy waste, contrasting it scornfully with the velvet meads which bordered English rivers. But Augusta, defective in imagination, never believed in anything she did not see. Therefore a reed-bed appeared to her mental vision till the day of her death always as a species of abnormal dismal swamp, lacking the traditional element of moisture.

Other explorations were made in the cool hours of the evening, but gradually Miss Neuchamp tired of the monotonous aspect of matters. The dusty tracts were not pleasant to her feet. The mosquitoes assailed her with savage virulence, whether she walked at sunrise, mid-day, or darkening eve. If she sat down on the river bank and watched the shallow but still pure and gleaming waters, ants of every conceivable degree of curiosity or ferocity discomposed her. There was no rest, no variety, no beauty, no 'proper' wood, valley, mountain, or brook. She could not imagine human beings living constantly in such a hateful wilderness. If Ernest had not all his life, and now most of all, developed

a talent for useless and incomprehensible self-sacrifice, he would abandon such a spot for ever.

Mr. Neuchamp felt himself pressed to his last entrenchments to defend his position; Fate seemed to have arrived personally, masked, not for the first time in man's strange story, in the guise of a woman. That woman, too, his persistent, inexorable cousin Augusta. 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.' The heavens, —dead to the dumb, imploring looks of the great armies of perishing brutes, to the prayers of ruined men; the earth, with withered herb and drying streamlet gasping and faint, breathless, under the burning noon and the pitiless dry moon rays, —alike conspired against him!

And now his cousin, who, with all her faults and defects, was stanchly devoted to her kindred and what she believed to be their welfare, came here to madden him with recollections of the wonderland of his birth, and to fill him with ignoble longings to purchase present relief by the ruinous sacrifice of purpose and principle.

'I don't know,' he said, at the end of a closely contested argument, 'whether all women are incapable of comprehending the adherence to a fixed purpose, to the unquestioned end and climax. But you must forgive me, my dear Augusta, for saying that you appear to me to be in the position of a passenger who urges the captain of a vessel to alter his course because the gale is wild and the waves rough. Suppose you had made a suggestion to the captain of the *Rohilla*, in which noble steamer you made your memorable voyage to these hapless isles. The officers of the great company are polished gentlemen as well as seamen of the first order, but I am afraid

Gordon Anderson would have been more curt than explanatory on *that* occasion.'

'And you are like the man in Sinbad the Sailor, as you like marine similes,' retorted Augusta; 'you will see your vessel gradually drawn toward the loadstone island till all the nails and rivets fly out by attraction of ruin, and you will sink in the waters of oblivion, unhonoured and unsung.'

'But not "unloved," I trust,' rejoined Ernest; 'don't think that matters, even in Australia, will be quite so bad as that. By the way, let me congratulate you upon your facility of quotation. Your memory must have improved amazingly of late.'

This unfair taunt closed the conversation abruptly. But like some squabbles between very near and dear friends, there was a tacit agreement not to refer to it. Subsequently all went on as usual.

Miss Neuchamp was a very fair horsewoman, having hunted without coming very signally to grief, by dint of a wonderfully broken hunter, who was first cousin to a rocking-horse—after this wise: he would on no account run away; he was easy, he was safe; you could not throw him down over any species of leap,—hedge, ditch, brook, or bulfinch. It was all alike to Negotiator. After a couple of seasons and the aid of this accomplished palfrey, Miss Neuchamp, with some reason, came to the conclusion that she could ride fairly well. So, having broached the idea at breakfast one morning, Ernest joyfully suggested Osmund as the type of ease and elegance, and of such a nerve that an organ and monkey might, were the consideration sufficient, be placed on his short back to-morrow without risk of casualty.

Miss Neuchamp thought that she should like to ride

down and visit the Freeman encampment, when Tottie, who would of course attend her, might have the opportunity of seeing her mother and other kinsfolk.

The side-saddle was the next difficulty: but Tottie proffered hers at once, saying that she could ride in a man's saddle, which she could borrow from Mr. Banks.

'But you cannot ride in a man's saddle, Mary Anne: at any rate with me,' said Miss Neuchamp decisively, while a maidenly blush overspread her features.

'Why not?' inquired Tottie, with much surprise. 'I can ride in one just as well as the other. You have only to throw the off-side stirrup over the pommel, sit square and straight, and there you are. You didn't think I was going to ride boy-fashion, did you?'

'I was not sure,' conceded Miss Neuchamp. 'However, your explanation has satisfied me. If you like, we will ride down to your father's place this afternoon.'

So Osmund being brought round, and Tottie's side-saddle upon him placed, that temperate charger walked off with Miss Neuchamp as if he had carried a 'pretty horsebreaker' up Rotten Row before the eyes of an envious aristocracy, while Tottie disposed herself upon a station saddle and ambled off so erect and free of seat that few could have known that she was crutchless and self-balanced. Mr. Windsor followed at a respectful distance, in case of any *contretemps* requiring a groom's assistance.

Miss Neuchamp was perhaps never more favourably impressed with the South Land, in which she was sojourning, than when she felt herself borne along by Osmund, a hackney of rare excellence—free, elastic, safe, fast, easy! How many horses of whom so much can be said does one come across in a lifetime?

‘This seems to be an exceedingly nice horse of my cousin’s,’ said she to Tottie. ‘I had no idea that such riding horses could be found in the interior. He must have been very carefully trained.’

‘He’s a plum, that’s what he is!’ affirmed Tottie with decision. ‘He’s the best horse in these parts, by long chalks. Mr. Neuchamp let me have a spurt on him one day. My word! didn’t I put him along?’

‘I am surprised that he should have let you ride him,’ replied Miss Neuchamp with dignity; ‘but my cousin is very eccentric, and does not, in my opinion, always keep his proper position.’

‘I don’t know about his proper position,’ said Tottie with great spirit, ‘but before our people had the row with him—and that was Uncle Joe’s fault—there was no one within fifty mile of Rainbar that wouldn’t have gone on their knees to serve Mr. Neuchamp. *As a gentleman he can’t be beat*; and many a one besides me thinks that.’

‘Oh well, if you have that sort of respectful feeling towards my cousin, Mary Anne, I have nothing to say,’ said Miss Augusta. ‘No one can possibly have better intentions, and I am glad to see them so well appreciated, even in the bush. Suppose we canter.’

She drew the curb rein as she spoke, and Osmund sailed off at a long, bounding, deerlike canter over the smooth dusty track, which convinced Miss Neuchamp that she had not left all the good horses in England. The scant provender had impaired his personal appearance, but had not deprived him of that courage which he would retain as long as he possessed strength to stand on his legs.

‘I have not enjoyed a ride like this for many a day,’



she said with unusual heartiness. 'This is a very comfortable saddle of yours, though I miss the third pommel. How do you manage, Mary Anne, to ride so squarely and easily upon that uncomfortable saddle?'

'I've ridden many a mile without a saddle at all—that is, with nothing but an old gummy-bag to sit on,' said Tottie, 'and jumped over logs too. Of course I was a kid then.'

'A what?' said Miss Neuchamp anxiously.

'Oh, a little child,' explained Tottie. 'I often used to go out at daylight to fetch in the cows and the working bullocks when we lived down the country. Bitter cold it was, too, in the winter; such hard frosts.'

'Frosts?' asked Miss Augusta. 'Do you ever have frosts? Why, I supposed they were unknown here.'

'You don't suppose the whole country is like this, miss?' said Tottie. 'Why, near the mountains there's snow and ice, and it rains every winter, and the floods are enough to drown you.'

'Are there floods too? It does not look as if they could ever come.'

'Do you see that hut, miss? That's our place. I heard Piambook, the black boy, tell father it would be swep' away some day. Father laughed at him.'

Here they arrived at the abode of Freeman *père*, at which Miss Neuchamp gazed with much curiosity.

In the language of architecture, the construction had been but little decorated. A plain and roughly-built abode, composed of round saplings nailed vertically to the wall-plate, and plastered insufficiently with mud. The roof was thatched with reeds, put on in a very ineffectual and chance-medley manner. The hut or cottage contained two large and three small rooms. There was

no garden whatever, or any attempt at the cultivation of the baked and hopelessly-looking clay soil. Close to the side of the house was a stockyard, comprising the 'gallows' of the colonists, a rough, rude contrivance, consisting of two uprights and a crosspiece, for elevating slaughtered cattle. Upon this structure was at present hanging the carcass of a fine six-months-old calf. No other enclosure was visible, the only attempt at the preservation of neatness being the sweeping of the earth immediately around the front and back doors.

Tottie immediately clattered up to the hut door, the black mare putting her head so far in that she obstructed the egress of a middle-aged woman, who made haste to come forth and receive the guests.

'Mother,' said the girl, 'here's Miss Neuchamp come to see you; bring a chair for her to get off by.'

This article of furniture having been supplied, Augusta was fain to descend upon it with as much dignity as she could manage, not being confident of her ability to drop down, like the agile Tottie, from a tallish horse, as was Osmund. Tottie, having given the horses in charge of a small brown-faced brother, who spent his whole time in considering Osmund, and apparently learning him by heart, welcomed Miss Neuchamp into her home. That young lady found herself for the first time under the roof of an Australian free-selector, and felt that she had acquired a new experience.

'Come in, miss; I'm very glad to see you, I'm sure; please to sit down,' was the salutation Augusta received, in tones that spoke a hearty welcome, in very pure unaccented English.

Miss Neuchamp selected the most 'reliable' looking of the wooden-seated American chairs, and depositing

herself thereon, looked around. The dwelling was, she thought, more prepossessing than the outside had led her to imagine. Though everything was plain to ugliness, there was yet nothing squalid or repulsive. All things were very clean. The room in which they sat was evidently only used as a parlour or 'living room.' It was fairly large and commodious. The earthen floor was hard, even, and well swept. A large table occupied the centre. The fireplace was wide and capacious, the mantelpiece so high that it was not easy to reach. There was a wooden sofa covered with faded chintz, and an American clock. Half a dozen cheap chairs, a shelf well filled with indifferently bound books, a few unframed woodcuts hung upon the walls, made up the furniture and ornamentation. Opening from this apartment laterally was evidently a bedroom. At the back a skilling, a lower roofed portion of the building, contained several smaller rooms. A detached two-roomed building, in what would have been the back-yard had any enclosure been made, was probably the kitchen and laundry.

Mrs. Freeman insisted upon putting down the kettle to boil, in order that she might make a cup of tea for her distinguished visitor, evidently under the opinion that every one naturally desired to drink tea whenever they could get it.

'And how have you been behaving yourself, Tottie?' said she, addressing her daughter, as a convenient mode of opening the conversation. 'I hope and trust you've been a help to Miss Neuchamp. Has she, miss?'

'Oh, certainly,' answered Augusta; 'Mary Anne has been a very good girl indeed. I don't know how I should get on without her. And I have borrowed her side-saddle too. How long will it be before Mr. Freeman comes home?'

‘Oh, he won’t be home much before dark. He’s always out on the run all day long. He hates coming in before the day is done.’

‘Why is that, Mrs. Freeman?’

“Because,” he says, “what can a man do after his day’s work but sit down and twirl his thumbs.” He haven’t got any garden here to fiddle about in, and he can’t sit still and smoke, like some people.’

‘But why don’t you have a garden?’ promptly inquired Augusta. ‘I suppose there’s no reason why you shouldn’t have one?’

‘You see, miss,’ said Mrs. Freeman, casting about for a mode of explaining to her young lady visitor that she didn’t know what she was talking about, ‘the ground ain’t very good just here; and though it’s so dry and baked just now, they say the floods come all over it; and perhaps we mightn’t be here altogether that long. And Freeman, he’s had a deal of trouble with the stock lately. I don’t say but what a garden would look pretty enough; but who’s to work in it? It ain’t like our place down the country. There we had a garden—lots of peaches and grapes, and more plums, apples, and quinces than we could use and give away, besides early potatoes and all kinds of vegetables.’

‘I suppose you regretted leaving such a home,’ said Miss Neuchamp, rather impressed by the hothouse profusion of the fruits mentioned.

‘Well, I’d rather live there on a pound a week,’ said Mrs. Freeman, ‘than here on riches. Freeman thought the stock would make up for all, but I didn’t, and I’m always sorry for the day we ever left the old farm.’

As the good woman spoke the tears stood in her eyes, and Miss Neuchamp much marvelled that any spot in

the desolate region of Australia should have power to attract the affection even of hard-worked, unrelieved Mrs. Freeman.

‘Mother’s always fretting about that old place at Bowning,’ said Tottie. ‘I don’t believe it was any great things either. It was a deal colder than this, and we had lots of milk and butter always; but bread and butter’s not worth caring about.’

‘You don’t recollect it, Tottie,’ said her mother, ‘or you would not talk in that way. Don’t you remember going into the garden to pick the peaches? How cool and shady it was in the mornings, to be sure, without scores of mosquitoes to sting and eat us up! Then there was always grass enough for the cows, and we had plenty of milk and butter and cheese, except, perhaps, in the dead of winter. It was better for all of us in other ways too, and that’s more.’

‘I don’t see that, mother,’ said Tottie.

‘But I do,’ said Mrs. Freeman, ‘and more than me knows it. There’s your father isn’t the same man, without his regular work at the farm, and the carrying and the other jobs, that used to fill up his time from daylight to dark. Now he’s nothing but the cattle to look after; and such weather as this there’s nothing to do from month’s end to month’s end, unless to pull them out of the waterholes. And I *know* he had a “burst” at that wretched *Stockman’s Arms* the last time he was down the river. He that was that sober before you could not tell him from a Son of Temperance.’

‘I feel sorry that you should have so much reason to complain of your lot,’ said Miss Neuchamp. ‘The poor, I am aware, are never contented, at least none that I ever saw in England. Yet it seems a pity, indeed, that

want of patience and trust in Providence should have led to your moving to this unsuitable and, I am afraid, ill-fated locality.'

'We're not altogether so poor, miss,' said the worthy matron, recovering herself. 'Abe will have over five hundred pounds in the bank when he's delivered up the land and the stock to this Mr. Levison, that's bought us all out. But what's a little money, one way or the other, if your life's miserable, and your husband takes to idle ways and worse, and your children grow up duffers and planters, and perhaps end in sticking up people?'

'Oh, mother, shut up!' ejaculated Tottie, with more kindness in her tone than the words would have indicated. 'Things won't be as bad as that. Don't I teach Poll and Sally and Ned and Billy? Besides, what does Miss Neuchamp know about duffing and sticking up? We'll be all right when we clear out next year, and you can go back to Bowning and buy Book's farm, and set father splitting stringy-bark rails for the rest of his life, if that's what keeps him good. I expect the tea is ready. Won't you give Miss Neuchamp a cup?'

Mrs. Freeman made haste to fill up a cup of tea, and a small jug of milk being produced, Miss Augusta found herself in possession of the best cup of tea she had tasted at Rainbar. She felt a sincere compassion for her hostess as a woman of properly submissive turn of mind, who had sense enough to regret her improper and irreligious departure from the lowly state in which Providence had placed her.

Promising to call again, and comforting the low-spirited matron as far as in her lay, she remounted Osmund with some difficulty by means of the chair, and rode homewards, followed by Mr. Windsor, who had



solaced his leisure by extracting from the younger girls, whom he had desecrated fishing, the latest news of the cattle operations of the family generally.

‘Your mother seems to be very much of my opinion, Mary Anne,’ said Miss Augusta as soon as they were fairly on the sandy home-station track, ‘that this is a most undesirable place to live in.’

‘Mother’s as good a woman as ever was,’ said Tottie, ‘but she don’t “savey.” She’s always fretting about our old farm; and it certainly was cooler—that’s about all the pull there was in it. Father’s made more money here in two or three years than he’d have got together in twenty there. I should have been hoeing corn all day with a pair of thick boots on, and grown up as wild as a scrub filly. I don’t want to go back.’

‘Your mother seems a person of excellent sense, Mary Anne, and I must say that I *fully agree with her*,’ said Miss Neuchamp, with her most unbending expression, designed to modify her attendant’s lightness of tone ‘Depend upon it, unhappiness and misfortune invariably follow the attempt to quit an allotted station in life.’

‘Oh, that be hanged for a yarn! Oh, I beg your pardon, miss,’ said Tottie confusedly, for she was on the point of relapsing into the Rainbar vernacular. ‘But surely every one ain’t bound to stop where they’re planted, good soil or bad, water or no water, like a corn-seed in a cow track or a pumpkin in a tree stump! Men and women have it in ’em to forage about a bit, else how do some people get on so wonderfully. I’ve read about self-help, and all that, and heaps of people beginning with half-a-crown and making fortunes. Ought they to have thrown the half-crown away or the fortune after they had made it?’

‘No doubt some people are apparently favoured,’ said Miss Augusta, regarding Tottie’s argument as another result of the over-education of ‘these sort of persons.’ ‘In the end it is often the worst thing that can befall them. Now let us canter.’

When Augusta Neuchamp had remained for a fortnight at Rainbar she began to perceive that the monotonous existence likely to be unreasonably prolonged would serve no object either of pleasure or profit. No amount of residence would teach her an iota more of the nature of such an establishment as Rainbar than she knew already. What was there to learn? The plains within sight of the cottage needed but to be indefinitely multiplied; and what then? An area of country equally arid, barren, unspeakably desolate. Other droves and herds of cattle equally emaciated. Nothing possibly could be in her eyes more hopeless and horrible than these endless death-stricken, famine-haunted wastes. Why did Ernest stay here? She had tried her utmost to induce him to abandon the whole miserable delusion, quoting the arguments of Mr. Jermyn Croker until he spoke angrily about that gentleman and closed the debate.

The obvious thing to do was to return to Sydney, but even this comparatively simple step was difficult to carry out. Miss Neuchamp did not desire again to tempt the perils of the road unattended. She had taken it for granted that Ernest, the most complying and good-natured of men ordinarily, would return to Sydney with her; and she had trusted to the influence of civilisation and her steady persuasion to prevail upon him to return to England to his friends, and to what she deemed to be his fixed and unalterable position in life.

On this occasion she met with unexpected opposition. Ernest positively declined to quit his station at present.

‘My dear Augusta,’ said he, ‘you do not know what you are asking. I have a number of very important duties to perform here. My financial state is an extremely critical one. I cannot with any decency appear in Sydney when everything points to the ruin of myself and my whole order. I am sincerely sorry that you should feel life here to be so extremely *ennuyant*, but I should never, if consulted, have advised you to come; and now I am afraid you must wait until a proper escort turns up or until I can accompany you.’

‘And when will that be?’

‘When the rain comes, certainly not before.’

Miss Augusta said that this last contingency was as probable as the near advent of the millennium. She would wait a given time, and, that expired, would go down to Sydney as she had come up by herself.

A fortnight, even three weeks, passed away. Augusta had mentioned a month as the outside limit of her forbearance. She read over and over ‘Mariana in the Moated Grange’ and ‘Mariana in the South’ with quite a new appreciation of their peculiar accuracy as well as poetic sentiment.

Daily she worked and read, and walked and rode, and alternately was hopeful or otherwise about the ultimate conversion of Tottie to the true faith of proper English village lowliness and reverence. Daily Ernest went forth ‘out on the run’ immediately after breakfast, reappearing only at or after sunset. Insensibly Miss Neuchamp became alarmed to find creeping over her a kind of provincial interest in the affairs of the ‘burghers of this desert city.’ She listened almost with excitement to the

account of a lot of the new cattle having been followed twenty miles over the boundary and recovered by Charley Banks. She heard of a bushranger being captured about fifty miles off—this was Jack Windsor's story; of the mail coming in twelve hours late in consequence of the horses being exhausted. Ernest gathered this from the overseer of the last lot of travelling sheep that passed through, having been locked up in Wargan Gaol for disobeying a summons. 'Such a handsome young fellow, miss.' This was Tottie's contribution.

What with the reading, the sewing, the teaching of Tottie, the daily cousinly walks and talks, the hitherto uncompromising Augusta became partially converted to station life, and finally admitted in conversation with Ernest that, other things being equal, she *could* imagine a woman enduring such privation for a few years, always assuming that she had the companionship of the one man to whom alone she could freely devote every waking thought, every pulsation of the heart.

'Do you think there's any man born, miss,' inquired Tottie, who was laying the cloth for dinner, but who stopped deliberately and listened with qualified approval to the sentence with which Miss Neuchamp concluded her statement—'any man born—except in a book—like that? I don't. They most of 'em seem to me to take it very easy, smoking and riding about, and drinking at odd times. It's the women that all the real pull comes on.'

'I was not addressing myself to you, Mary Anne,' replied Miss Augusta with dignity; 'I was speaking to Mr. Neuchamp only. I should hardly think your experience entitled you to offer an opinion.'

'H—m,' said Tottie, proceeding with the plates. 'I'm young, and I suppose I don't know much. But I

hear what's going on. Don't you think I'd better go down to Sydney, to take care of you on the road, miss, in case there's a Chinaman to knock over? I think I could do that, if I was drove to it.'

On the next day an unusual occurrence took place in that land where events and novelties seemed to have perished like the grass, under the slow calcining of the deadly season—a dray arrived from town.

Miss Neuchamp, in her sore need of change and occupation, could have cheerfully witnessed the unpacking of ordinary station stores, in which, as usual, a little drapery would be comprised. But here again disappointment. It was merely a load of flour.

Depressed and discouraged, Miss Neuchamp had condescended to watch the unloading of the unromantic freight, deriving a faint interest in noting with what apparent ease Jack Windsor and Charley Banks placed the heavy bags upon their shoulders and deposited them in the store.

Rarely was Miss Augusta so lowered in spirit as not to be able to talk. On this occasion she had informed Tottie, with some relish, that English country girls were much ruddier and more healthy looking, as well as, she doubted not, stronger and more capable of endurance, than those born in Australia could possibly be.

'Why so?' inquired Tottie with animation.

'Why?' said Miss Neuchamp with asperity; 'because of the cool, beautiful climate they live in, the regular, wholesome labour they are born to, the superiority of the whole land and people to this dull, deceitful country, all sand and sun-glare.'

'Well, I can't say, miss,' replied Tottie, plotting a surprise, with characteristic coolness, 'about English

girls' looks, because I've hardly ever seen any; but as for health, I've a middling appetite, I never was a day ill since I was born, and as to being strong—look here.'

Before the horrified Augusta could forbid her rapid motion, she bounded over to the dray, from which Mr. Windsor had just borne his two hundred pounds of farina. She placed her back beneath the lessening load, and stretching her arms upward in the way proper to grasp the tied corner of the bag, said imperiously, 'Here, Mr. Carrier, just you lower that bag steady; I want to show the English lady what a Currency girl can walk away with.'

The tall sunburned driver entered into the joke, and winking at Charley Banks, who stood by laughing, he placed the heavy bag fairly and square upon Tottie's plump shoulders. Miss Neuchamp's gaze was riveted upon the erratic 'help' as if she had been about to commit suicide.

'Oh! don't—don't,' she gasped; 'are you mad, Mary Anne? You will break your back, or cripple yourself for life. Mr. Banks, pray interfere! I am sure my cousin will be angry—pray stop her!'

Charley Banks was not afraid that anything dreadful would happen. He had seen the bush girls perform feats of strength and activity ere now which proved to him that very little cause for apprehension existed in the present case.

And there was not much time. For one moment the girl stood, with her arms raised above her head, her figure, in its natural and classic grace, proving the unspeakable advantage of the free, open-air life, with fullest liberty for varied exercise, which she had had from her birth. The next she had moved forward with firm,



elastic tread, under a load which a city man out of training would have found no joke, and, walking into the store, permitted it to fall accurately beside the others which had been shot from the backs of Jack Windsor and Mr. Banks into their appointed corner.

There was a slight cheer, and an exclamation of, 'Well done, Tottie,' as she returned with a heightened colour and half-triumphant, half-confused air to Miss Neuchamp, who, relieved at her safe return from the dangerous feat, did not administer so severe a rebuke as might have been expected.

'You may be thankful, Mary Anne, if you do not hereafter discover that this day's folly has laid the foundation of lifelong ill-health. But come into the house, child. You *have* some colour for once. Let me see no more pranks of this sort again, while *I* am here.'

'Lor, miss,' said Tottie, 'that's not the first bag of flour I've carried. And father says there was a girl he knew at the Hawkesbury that took one—and *him a-top of it*—around her father's barn. He was only a boy then.'

'I think you may lay the tea, Mary Anne,' said Miss Neuchamp, not requiring any more Hawkesbury anecdotes. 'I feel unusually fatigued to-day.'

Fortunately for all parties, before the extreme limit of Miss Neuchamp's patience and the resources of Rainbar had been reached, a welcome auxiliary arrived in the person of Mr. Middleton. That worthy paterfamilias had been compelled to visit his outlying stations, in order to ascertain the precise amount of death and destruction that was taking place, and was returning to his usual residence nearer the settled districts. He travelled in a light buggy with one horse, being thus enabled to carry

a supply of forage, and even water, with him. This, the only known plan for crossing 'dry country' in a bad season, and at the same time maintaining a horse in tolerable condition, was not ornamental in detail. The buggy, with two bags of chaff secured behind, a bushel of maize in front, and a large water bag and bucket swung from the axle, had a striking and unusual effect. But the active, upstanding roadster was in better condition than any horse which had passed Rainbar for many a day, and Mr. Neuchamp at once saw his way to a transfer of responsibility, as far as Miss Augusta was concerned.

'Well, Neuchamp, what do you think of Australia now?' said the old gentleman, in a jolly voice, as, sun-burned and dusty, with a great straw hat, a curtain and a net veil, a canvas hood to his buggy, and the fodder previously referred to picturesquely disposed about his travelling carriage, he drove up to the verandah, causing Augusta to put up her eyeglass with amazement. 'Made any striking alterations for our good? Wish you'd try your hand at the weather, if that's in your line.'

'Come in, and we'll talk it over,' replied Ernest. 'I'm charmed to see you in any kind of weather. Permit me to present you to my cousin, Miss Neuchamp, who doesn't approve of your country at all. I must inform you, Augusta, this is Mr. Middleton, my fellow-passenger, whom you have heard me mention. I hope the ladies are all well.'

'Pretty well when they wrote last; but, like all ladies, I fancy, they are terribly tired of the present state of the season — and no wonder. I can only recollect one worse drought during the thirty years I have been out here.'

‘Worse!’ ejaculated Augusta. ‘I should have thought that impossible. How did you contrive to exist?’

‘We *did* manage to keep alive, as I am here to testify,’ laughed the old gentleman, whose proportions were upon an ample and generous scale; ‘but of course it was a serious matter in every aspect. However, we weathered that famine, and we shall get over this, with patience and God’s blessing.’

That evening it was definitely arranged that Mr. Middleton should give Miss Neuchamp a seat in his encumbered but not overladen buggy as far as his own home station, which he trusted to reach in a week; after which he would undertake, when she was tired of Mrs. Middleton and the girls, to deposit her safely in Sydney.

This was an unlooked-for piece of good fortune. Ernest was much relieved in mind at being freed from the dilemma of returning Augusta as a kind of captive princess of Rainbar, or undertaking an expensive and inopportune journey for the sole purpose of accompanying her to a place which she never should have quitted.

Mr. Middleton, confident of securing provender, now that he had commenced to approach the confines of civilisation, was not sorry to be provided with a young lady companion, having had of late much of his own unrelieved society; and Augusta was more pleased than she cared to show at the prospect of escape from this Sahara existence, without the prestige of the desert or the novelty of Arabs. That night her portmanteau was packed, Tottie coming in for the reversion of as much raiment as constituted her an authority in fashions ‘on the river’ ever after, and such a *douceur* as confirmed her in Mr. Bank’s high estimate of Miss Neuchamp as a ‘real lady.’

At six o'clock next morning Augusta Neuchamp bade farewell for ever to the abode of the Australian representative of her ancient house.

'When shall I see you in Sydney, Ernest?' she said, as a last inquiry. 'I daresay they will wish to know at Morahmee.'

'When the rain comes,' said Ernest resolutely. 'Good-bye, Middleton; take great care of her. Remember me to the ladies.' And they were off.

It has been more than once remarked by those of our species who rely for their intellectual recreation less upon action than observation, that great events are apt to be produced by inconsiderable causes. The sighing summer breeze sets free the mountain avalanche. The spark creates the red ruin of a conflagration. The rat in Holland perforates a dam and floods a province.

Mr. Neuchamp sat in his apartment at Rainbar contrasting, doubtfully, his regret at the departure of his cousin with his recovered sense of freedom and independence. True, she was the sole link which in Australia connected him with the thousand spells of home.

But, ever angular in mind, she had proved herself to be so incapable of accommodation to the necessarily altered conditions of a new land, that he had despaired of her acclimatisation. She had even failed to comprehend them.

'This is the result,' he would assert to himself, 'of her deficiency in the faculty of imagination. It may be there are other reasons, but I trace her special failure in *camaraderie* to this neglect of her fairy godmother.'

A person with deficient ideality is necessarily imprisoned by the present. Unable to portray for themselves a presentment of unaccustomed conditions on the

mental canvas, such as is traced by Fancy, coloured by Hope, yet corrected by Prudence, they are wholly precluded from the prevision, even in part, of the living wonders, the breathing enchantments, of the future. To them no city of rest, glorious and beautiful, arises from the dull vulgarities of life and endeavour; all with them is of the earth, earthy. A gospel of hard-eyed economy, grudging gain, unrelieved toil, for the poor; for the sordid aspirant, by endless thrift and striving, 'property, property, property;' for the rich, a message of selfish enjoyment, grasping monopoly, ungenial ease.

'Such would the world be were the human mind divested of the sublime attributes of Faith and Imagination!' exclaimed Ernest, borne away from his present cares. 'There may be perils for the glad mariner on the sun-bright, flashing wave: but he has the possible glory of descrying purple isles, undiscovered continents. Dying, he falls as a hero; living, he may survive to be hailed as the world's benefactor.'

Much comforted by these bright-hued imaginings and illuminings of the path in which he knew himself to be an ardent traveller, Mr. Neuchamp awaited his mail-bag with more than usual serenity.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE untoward season had not been without its effect upon the thousand and one gardens that paint, in each vivid delicate hue, with flower tracery and plant glory, the rocky steeps and fairy nooks which engirdle Sydney. The undulating lawns were dimmer, the plant masses less profuse, the showery blooms less dazzling, the trailers less gorgeous, than in other years. Yet were not the shores of the fair, wondrous haven, beloved by Ocean for many a long-past æon of lonely joy, before the bold scion of a sea-roving race invaded its giant portals, without some tokens of his favour. In the long, throbbing, burning days, when the sun beat blistering upon the heated roof, the white pavement, the dusty streets, he summoned from beyond the misty blue horizon the rushing wind-sisters fresh from the ice-galleries, the snow-peaks, the frozen colonnades of that lone land where sits enthroned in dazzling splendour, during days that die not or nights that never end, the sorceress of the Southern Pole. From their wings, frost-jewelled, dripped gentlest showers, refreshing the shore, though they passed not the great mountain range which so long guarded the hidden treasure-lands of the central waste. Hot and parched, compared with former seasons, the autumn seemed end-



less, yet were the gardens and shrubberies of Morahmee so comparatively verdant and fresh, from their proximity to the sea, that Ernest would have hailed it as an Eden of greenest glory, in comparison with the 'sun-scorched desert brown and bare' which Rainbar had long resembled.

Among the inhabitants of Sydney who made daily moan against the slow severity of the hopeless season (and who had in some cases good cause, in diminished incomes and receding trade, for such murmurings), Paul Frankston, to his great surprise, found his daughter to be enrolled.

This occurrence, involving as he thought a radical change of disposition, if not of character, much alarmed the worthy merchant. Calm and resolute, if occasionally variant of mood, Antonia Frankston had hitherto been one of the least querulous of mortals. Sufficiently cultured to comprehend that the stupendous laws of the universe were not controlled by the fancied woe or weal of feeble man, she had never sympathised with the unmeaning deprecation of climatic occurrences.

'The wind and the weather are in God's hands,' she had once answered to some shallow complainer. 'What are we that we should dare to blame or praise? Besides, I am a sailor's daughter, and at sea they take the weather as it comes.'

In other matters, which could be set right by personal supervision or self-denial, she held it to be most unworthy weakness to make bitter outcry or vain lamentation. 'If the evil can be repaired, why not at once commence the task? If hopeless, then bear it with firmness. Provide against its recurrence, if you like; but, in any case, what possible good can talking or, more correctly, whining do? That is the

reason why men so often despise women, so often suffer from them. Look at *them* when anything goes wrong,—how hard they work, how little they talk! Perhaps they smoke the more. But even that has the virtue of silence, and therefore of wisdom. Talk is a very good thing in the right place, but when things go wrong, it is *not* in its right place.’

In former days of autumn, when the rains came not, when the flowers drooped, when bad news came from Paul Frankston’s pastoral constituents, and that worthy financier was troubled in mind, or smoked more than his proper allowance of cigars over the consideration of the state of trade, it was Antonia who invariably cheered and consoled him. She pointed out the triumphs of the past; she steadfastly counselled trust in the future; she soothed the night with her songs; she cheered the day with unfailing ministration to his comfort and habitudes.

Now, curiously, the old man thought his darling was different from what he had ever recollected. She suffered repinings to escape her as to the weary rainless season. She did not deny or controvert his occasional grumbling assertions, after a hot day in the city, that the whole country was going to the bad. She was, wonder of wonders, occasionally irritable with the servants, and impatient of their shortcomings. She kept her books unchanged and apparently unread for a time unprecedented in Mr. Shaddock’s experience.

Mr. Frankston could not by any means comprehend this deflection of his daughter’s equable mental constitution. After much consideration he came to the conclusion that she wanted change of air—that the depressing hot season was telling upon her health for the first time in his recollection; and he cast about for an eligible chance

to send her to some friends in Tasmania, where the keener air, the somewhat more bracing island climate, might restore her to the animation which he feared she was losing day by day.

He thought also, amid his loving plans and plottings for his daughter's welfare, that possibly she needed the stimulus of additional society. They had been living quietly at Morahmee of late, and the season of comparative gaiety, which in Sydney generally dates from the birthnight of the Empress of Anglo-Saxondom, had not as yet arrived.

'We want a little rousing up,' thought poor Paul; 'we have had no little dinners lately, no one in the evenings. I have been thinking over this confounded season and these bothering bills till I have forgotten my own darling, but for whose sake the whole country might be swallowed up in Mauna Loa, for all old Paul cares. I shouldn't say that either: but it seems hard that anything should ail the poor darling that care might have prevented. If her mother had lived—ah!' and here Paul fell a-thinking, until the wheels of the dogcart grated against the pavement near the office door.

Thus it so chanced that, towards the end of the week, occurred one of the little dinners for which Morahmee was famous, with a 'whip' of certain musical celebrities of the neighbourhood, and as many ordinary guests as made a successful compromise between all 'music,' which sometimes hath not 'charms' for the masculine breast, and a regulation evening party, which would have been an anachronism.

Among the guests for whom Paul, in his anxiety for a healthful distraction for Antonia, had swept the clubs and the hotels, were Mr. Hardy Baldacre and Jermyn

Croker. Squatters were scarce in Sydney beyond previous experience. They were all at home on their stations attending to their stock, except those who were in town attending to their bills. These last were chiefly indisposed to society. They dined at their clubs or hotels after half a day's waiting in the manager's ante-chamber, and felt more inclined for the repose of the smoking-room than for the excitement of the society.

Mr. Hardy Baldaire had managed to come to town, however, without such anxieties of a pecuniary nature as interfered with his amusements. Of these he partook of as full measure of every kind and description as he could procure cheaply. He had early developed a taste for pleasure, controlled only by considerations of caution and economy. Those who knew him well disliked him thoroughly, and with cause. Those who met him occasionally, as did Mr. Neuchamp and Paul Frankston, saw in him a well-dressed, good-looking man, with an affectation of good-humour and liberality by no means without attraction. Paul *had* heard assertions made to his disadvantage, but not having bestowed much thought upon the matter, had not gone the length of excluding him from his invitation list; on this occasion he had been rather glad to fill up his table.

Mr. Jermyn Croker, as usual, had constituted himself an exception to ordinary humanity by remaining at his club during the terrible season which sent the most ardent lovers of the metropolis to their distant duties. In explanation he stated that either the whole country would be ruined or it would not. He frankly admitted that he inclined to the first belief. If the former state of matters prevailed, what was the use of living in the desert till the last camel died and the last well was

choked? No human effort could avert the final sinoom, which was evidently on its way to engulf pastoral Australia. Now, here at the club (though the wines were beastly, as usual, and the committee ought to be sacked) there would be a little claret and ice available to the last. He should remain and perish, where, at least, a club waiter could see to your interment.

Such was Mr. Jermyn Croker's faith, openly professed in club and counting-house. But those who knew him averred that he took good care to have one of the best overseers in the country at his head station, whose management he kept up to the mark by weekly letters of so consistently depreciatory a nature that nobody expected *he* would survive the season, whatever the issue to others. 'Died of a bad season and Jermyn Croker' had, indeed, been an epitaph written in advance and forwarded to him by a provincial humorist.

Hartley Selmore had also been found available. He, indeed, could not very well remain away from financial headquarters. So many of his unpaid orders and acceptances, with the ominous superscription 'Refer to drawer,' found their way to bank and office by every mail from the interior, that a residence in the metropolis was vitally necessary. In good sooth, his unflagging energy and great powers of resource, under the presence of constant emergency, were equal to the demand made upon them. With the aid of every device of discount and hypothecation known to the children of finance, he managed to keep afloat. His day's work, neither light nor easy of grasp, once over, the philosophical Hartley enjoyed his dinner, his cigar, his whist or billiards, as genuinely as if he had not a debt in the world, and was always ready for a *petit dîner* if he distrusted not the wine.

This dinner was, as usual, perfect in its way. The cooking at Morahmee was proverbial; the wines were too good for even Jermyn Croker to grumble at—had he done so he would have imperilled his reputation as connoisseur, of which he was careful; the conversation of the guests, at first guarded and unsympathetic, rose into liveliness with the conclusion of the first course, and, simultaneously with the circulation of Paul's unrivalled well-iced vintage, became more adventurous and brilliant.

'Where is our young friend Neuchamp?' inquired Hartley Selmore. 'I haven't seen him for an age.'

'Gone to the bad long ago, hasn't he?' replied Croker, with an air of pleasing certainty.

'Heard he had bought a terribly overrated place on the Darling,' said Selmore. 'Very sharp practice of Parklands. Too bad of him—too bad, wasn't it, now?'

'Was it as good a bargain as Gammon Downs, Mr. Selmore?' inquired Antonia, with a faint resemblance to former archness that lit up her melancholy features. 'I am afraid there is not much to choose between you hardened pioneers when there is a newly-landed purchaser signalled.'

'Really, Miss Frankston, really!' replied Selmore, with a fine imitation of the chivalrous and disinterested; 'you do some of us injustice. In all this dreadful season, I assure you, the creeks at Gammon Downs are running like English brooks, and the grass is green—absolutely green!'

'Why, what colour should it be, Mr. Selmore—blue or magenta? But you know that I am an Australian, and therefore must have learned in the many conversations which have passed in my hearing about station matters that "green grass country" is generally spoken



disrespectfully of, and "permanent water" is not everything. But we will not continue the rather worn subject.'

'I fancy Neuchamp can't be doing so badly,' cut in Hardy Baldacre, with his customary assurance, 'for I hear he is going to be married.'

'Married!' echoed Antonia, as she felt the tide of life arrested in her veins for one moment, and, with the next, course wildly back to her beating heart. 'Married, Mr. Baldacre, and why not? But papa often hears from him, don't you, pappy, and he never mentioned it.'

'Mentioned it! I should think not,' growled Paul, with a leonine accent, as scenting danger. 'I heard from him, let me see, a month or two back. I don't believe a word of it. Who to?'

'Well, *I saw the young lady*,' persisted Baldacre, wholly unabashed, while he noted Antonia's pale and unmoved features. 'I went up in the coach with her, half way to Rainbar. She's a cousin of his own; same name. Just out from England, and ever so rich.'

'How the deuce should she go alone up to Rainbar?' said Paul, full of doubt and dread. 'Surely *we* should have heard of her, when she landed.'

'She told me that she made up her mind suddenly to come out to him—did not let him know, and only stayed a week in Sydney, at Petty's.'

'Most romantic!' said Antonia, driving the unseen dagger more deeply into her heart, after the fashion of her sex, but smiling and forcing a piteous and unreal gaiety; 'and was she fair to look upon—a blonde or brunette? Mr. Baldacre, you were evidently in her confidence; you cannot escape a description.'

'She was very good-looking indeed,' said the ruthless

Hardy, who had been struck with Augusta's fresh complexion and insular manner. 'She wore a gold eyeglass, which looked odd; but she was very clever, and all that kind of thing, as any one could see.'

'Even Mr. Baldaere,' said Antonia, with a sarcastic acknowledgment. 'You must have had a delightful journey. You will tell me any other particulars that occur to you in the drawing-room. I feel quite interested.'

Here the faint signal passed which proclaims the withdrawal of the lady *convives* and the temporary separation of the sexes. What mysterious rites are celebrated above by the assembled maids and matrons, freed awhile from the disturbing influence of the male element? Does a wholly unaffected, perhaps unamused expression possess those lovely features, erst so full of every virtue showing forth in every look? Do they exchange confidences? Do they *trust* each other? Do they doff their uniforms, and appear unarmed, save with truth, innocence, simplicity? *Quien sabe?*

It may not have been apparent to the lady guests, to whose comfort and enlivenment Antonia was so assiduous, so delicately, yet so unfailingly attentive in her rôle of hostess, that Miss Frankston's heart was beating, her head aching, her temples throbbing, her pulse quickened, to a degree which rendered the severest mental effort necessary to avoid collapse. They heeded not the faint smile, the piteous quivering lip, the sad eyes, while words of mirth, of compliment, of entreaty, flowed rapidly forth, as she played her part in the game we call society. But when the small pageant was over and the last carriage rolled away she threw her arms round old Paul's neck, and resting her head upon that breast which had cherished her, with all a woman's love, and but little short

of a woman's tenderness, since her baby days of broken doll and lost toy, she lay in his clasp and sobbed as if her heart—poor overburdened, loving, despairing heart—was in verity, then and there, about to break.

'My darling, my darling! my own precious pet, Antonia!' said the old man, kissing her forehead, and wiping the tears from her eyes, as he had done many a time and oft in the days of her childish grief. 'I know your sorrow and its cause; but do not be too hasty. We do not know if this loose report be true. It is most unlikely and improbable to me; though, if it be true, Paul Frankston is not the man to suffer this wrong to lie a day without—without claiming his right. But do not take it for proved truth till further tidings come.'

'It *is* true—it is true,' moaned Antonia. 'I had a foreboding. I have been so wretched of late—so unlike you daughter, my dearest father. How could Hardy Baldacre have invented such a story? Why did he not give his—his betrothed—our address, if he had no—no—reason to do otherwise?' sobbed poor Antonia.

'I can't say—I don't know—hang her and her eye-glass—and the day I first saw him enter this house! But, no, I cannot hate the boy, whose pleasant face so often made a second youth for me. I hate taking things for granted; I must have proof before I—and then—Go to bed, my darling, go to bed: I will tell you what I think in the morning.'

It was well for Miss Frankston, perhaps, that the intense pain towards which her headache had gradually culminated rendered her for a while unable to frame any mental processes. As she threw herself upon the couch she was conscious of a crushing feeling of utter darkness and blank despair, which simulated a swoon.

She awoke to a state of mind to her previously unknown. In her breast conflicting emotions passionately contended. Chief among them was the bitter disappointment, the indignant sense of slight and betrayal, endured by every woman who, conscious that each inmost sacred feeling of her heart has been given to the hero of her choice, has been deliberately forsaken for another.

True, no word of love, no promise, no seeking of favour on one side, no half denial, half granting of precious gifts, had passed between them. In one sense, the world would have held him harmless, while friends and companions of her own sex, prone always to decry and distrust all feminine victims, would most certainly hint at mistaken feelings, delusive hopes, on her part—would be ready to welcome and to tempt the successful purloiner of a sister's heart, the unpunished wrecker of a sister's happiness.

But was there no tacit agreement, no unwritten bond, no fixed and changeless contract, slowly but imperceptibly traced in characters faint and pale, then clearer, fuller, deepening daily to indelible imprint on her heart—upon his, surely upon his? Were the outpourings of the hitherto sacred thoughts, feelings, emotions, from the innermost receptacles of an unworn, untempted nature, to be reckoned as the idle, meaningless badinage of society? Were the friendly counsels, the deep, unaffected interest, the frank brotherly intercourse, all to pass for nothing—to be translated into the careless courtesy affected by every formal visitor?

And yet, again, did not such things happen every day? Her own experience was not so limited but that she had known more than one pale maiden, weary of life, sick unto death for a season, unable as a fever patient to

simulate ordinary cheerfulness because of the acted, if not spoken, falsehood of man. Had she pitied these too confiding victims, these hopeless, uncomplaining invalids, maimed in the battle of life, hiding the mortal wound from human gaze, bearing up with trembling steps the burden of premature age and sorrow?

Had not her pity savoured of contempt—her kindness of toleration? and now, lo! it was her own case. But could it be *herself*—Antonia Frankston, who from childhood had felt no want that wealth and opportunity could supply? who had never known a slight or felt an injury since childhood's hour? to whom all sorrow and sufferings incidental to what books and fanciful persons called 'love' were as practically unknown as snow blindness to an inhabitant of the Sahara? Was she a wronged, insulted, deserted woman like those others? It was inconceivable! it was phantasmal! it was impossible! She would sleep, and with the dawn the ghastly fear would be fled. Perhaps this dull pain in her throbbing temples, this darksome mysterious heart-agony, would leave her. Who knows?

It is wonderful how much is taken for granted every day in this world, more especially in the interest of evil devices.

Mr. Hardy Baldacre would have been sorely puzzled by a cross-examination, but no one had presence of mind to put it to the proof. He was rapid in conceiving his plans, wonderfully accurate and thoughtful in carrying them through. His endowments were exceptional in their way. Bold, even to audacity, he never hesitated: cunning and unscrupulous, he pursued his schemes, whether for money-making or for personal aggrandisement of the lower sort, with a swift and sure directness

worthy of more exalted aim. Undaunted by failure, he was careless of partial loss of reputation. He was known by the superficial crowd as a successful operator whenever there was a bargain to be had in stock or station property. He was shunned and disliked by those better informed and more scrupulous in their acknowledgment of friends, as a gambler, a niggard, and a crafty profligate.

Such was the man who had succeeded, by a lying device, in working present evil—it may be, incalculable future misery—to two persons who had never injured him. In this deliberate fabrication he had two ends in view. He secretly envied and disliked Ernest Neuchamp for qualities and attainments which he could never hope to rival. He was one of a class of Australians who cherish an ignorant prejudice against Englishmen, regarding them as conceited and prone to be contemptuous of the provincial magnate. With characteristic cunning he had kept this feeling to himself, always treating Mr. Neuchamp with apparent friendliness. But he was none the less determined to deal him an effectual blow when an opportunity should offer. The time had come, and he had struck a felon blow, which had pierced deeply the pure, passionate heart of Antonia Frankston.

He had for some time past honoured that young lady with his very questionable approbation. He admired her personally after his fashion; but he thoroughly appreciated and heartily desired to possess himself of what constituted in his eyes her crowning charm and attribute—the large fortune which Paul Frankston's heiress must, in spite of all changes of season and fluctuation of securities, inevitably inherit.

Not unskilled in the ways of women, with whom his



undeniable good looks and his prestige of wealth gave him a certain popularity, he thought he saw his way during her period of anger and mortification to a dash at the lady and the money, which needed but promptness and resolution to ensure a strong chance of success.

He saw by her change of countenance, by her forced gaiety, by her every look and tone, that the barbed arrow had sped far and been surely lodged.

‘Neuchamp, like a fool as he was, had evidently not written lately. The cousin (and a deuced fine girl, too, with pots of money of her own) had been staying up at Rainbar—a queer thing to do. Old Middleton, when bringing her to his place, had told every one that she was his friend Neuchamp’s cousin. It would be some time before Frankston or his daughter would find out the untruth of the report. In the meantime he would butter up the old man, humbug him with regret for his occasional “wildness,” promise all kinds of amendment and square behaviour for the future; then go straight to the girl, who, of course, could know nothing of his life and time, and say, “Here am I, Hardy Baldacre, with a half share in Baredown, Gogeldra, and No-good-damper (hang it; I must change that)—anyway, three of the best cattle properties of the south; here am I, not the worst-looking fellow going, at your service. Take me, and we’re off to Melbourne or Tasmania for a wedding-trip, and that stuck-up beggar Neuchamp may marry his cousin, and go up King Street the next week for all we care.” I shan’t say the last bit. But it will occur to her. Women always think of everything, though they don’t say it. That might fetch her. Anyhow, the odds are right. I’m on!’

This exceedingly practical soliloquy having been

transacted at his hotel during the performance of his toilette, Mr. Baldacre partook of the matutinal soda-and-brandy generally necessary for the perfect restoration of his nerves, and breakfasted, with a settled resolution to call at Morahmee that afternoon.

This intention he carried out. He found Antonia apparently not unwilling to receive him upon a more intimate conversational footing than he ever recollected having been accorded to him. She was in that state of anxiety, unhappiness, and nervous irritability which makes the patient only too willing to fly to the relief afforded by a certainty even of evil. The climber upon Alpine heights, with shuddering death-cry, ever and anon casts himself into the awful chasm on the verge of which his limbs trembled and his overwrought brain reeled. The overtaxed sufferer under the pangs of mortal disease chooses death rather than the continuance of the pitiless torment. So the agonised heart, poised on the dread pinnacle of doubt, flees to the Lethean peace of despair.

Having not unskilfully brought the conversation round to the subject of Miss Neuchamp, Mr. Baldacre touched, with more or less humour, on certain unguarded remarks of that inexperienced but decided traveller. He enlarged, as if accidentally, upon her good looks and apparent cleverness, giving her the benefit of a tremendous reputation for learning of the abstrusest kind, and generally exaggerating all the circumstances which might render probable the admiration of an ultra-refined aristocrat.

Much of this delicate finesse, as Mr. Baldacre considered it to be, was transparent and despicable in the eyes of his listener. But, difficult as it may be to account for, otherwise than by ignoring all known rules

and maxims for the comprehension of that mysterious mechanism, the feminine heart, there was, nevertheless, something not wholly disagreeable in the outspoken admiration of the bold-eyed, eager admirer who now pressed his suit.

With one of the sudden, tempestuously capricious changes of mind, common to the calmest as to the most impulsive individual of the irresponsible sex, a vague, morbid desire for finality at all hazards arose in her brain. She had listened and loved, and waited and dreamed, and dedicated her leisure, her mental power, her *life*, to the path of habit and culture which would render her every thought and speech and act more harmonious with his ideal. She had thought but of him. He had his plans, his projects, a man's career, his return to England—a thousand things to distract him—all these might delay the declaration of his love. But she had never thought of *this*! She had never in wildest flight of conjecture conjured up a *fiancé*, a cousin loved from earliest child-betrothals, to whom he doubtless had written pages of minute description of all their well-intended kindness and provincial oddities at Morahmee.

And was she to sigh and droop, and pale and wither, beneath the unexplained, unshared burden of betrayed love? Had she not seen the colour fade from the fair cheek, leaving a cold ashen-gray tint where once was bright-hued joy, eager mirth, and laughter? Had she not seen the light die out of the pleading, wistful eyes, once so deeply glowing, so tender bright, the step fall heavy, the voice lose its ring, the *woman* quit the haunted dwelling where a dead heart lay buried and a still, gray-hued, hard-toned tenant sat therein, for ever-

more resignedly indifferent to all things beneath the sky? Was this her near inexorable fate?

No! a thousand times, no! Had she not in her veins the bold blood of Paul Frankston, the fearless searover, who had more than once awed a desperate crew by the promptness of his weapon and the terror of his name? And was she to sink into social insignificance, and tacitly sue for the pity of *him* and others, because she had mistaken his feelings and he had with masculine cruelty omitted to consider hers?

No! again, no! The rebellious blood rushed to her brow, as she vowed to forget, to despise, to trample under foot, the memory, false as a broken idol, to which she had been so long, so blindly faithful. And as all men save one—for even in that hour of her wrath and misery she could not find it in her heart to include her father among the reprobate or despicable of his sex—were alike unworthy of a maiden's trust, a maiden's prayers, why not confide herself and her blighted heart to the custody of this one, who, at least, was frank and unhesitating in proffering his love and demanding her own?

Mr Hardy Baldacre had not thought it expedient to delay bringing matters to a climax, fearing that highly inconvenient truth, with respect to the fair Augusta, might arrive at any moment. With well-acted bluntness of sincerity he had adjured Miss Frankston to forgive his sudden, his unpremeditated avowal of affection.

'He was a rough bushman,' he confessed, 'not in the habit of hiding his feelings. On such a subject as this he could not bear the agony of anxiety or delay. He must know his fate, even if the doom of banishment, of just anger at his imprudence, went forth against him.

He expected nothing else. But if, before condemning him to go back to his far-off home (little she knew of its peculiar characteristics) a lonely, despairing man, she would only give consideration to his claims, rashly but respectfully urged, she might deign to accept a manly heart, the devotion of a life that henceforth, in good or bad fortune, was hers, and hers only.'

Mr. Hardy Baldaire had an imposing, stalwart figure, by no means unfashionably attired, and Nature, while unsolicitous about his moral endowments, had gifted him with a handsome face. If not in the bloom of youth, he had not passed by a day the matured vigour of early manhood. As he bent his dark eyes upon Antonia and poured forth his not entirely original address, but which, heard in the tones of a pleading flesh-and-blood lover, sounded a deal better than it reads, Antonia felt a species of mesmeric attraction to the fatal and irrevocable 'yes,' which should open a new phase of life to her and obliterate the maddening, hopeless, endless past. *For one moment*, for one only, the fate of Antonia Frankston wavered on the dread eternal balance. She fluttered, birdlike, under the fascination of his serpentine gaze. Her words of regret and courteous dismissal refused to find utterance. At length she said, 'I must have time to consider your flattering but quite unexpected offer. You will, I am sure, not press for an immediate answer. I will see you again. Meanwhile let me tell you that I value your good opinion, and shall always recall with pleasure your very kind intention of to-day.'

But, with that still hour of evening meditation in which Antonia was wont to indulge before retiring, came calmer, humbler, more tranquillising thoughts. As she sat at her chamber window, looking out over the wide

waters of the bay, in which a crescent moon caused the endless bright expanse of tremulous silver, the frowning headlands, the garden slopes, to be all clearly, delicately visible,—as she heard the rhythmical, solemn cadence of the deep-toned eternal surge,—she recalled the moon-lighted eves, the soul-to-soul communing of ‘that lost time.’

A strong reactionary feeling occupied her heart. It seemed as if, like the rushing of the tide, the stormy sway of the ocean she loved so well, her heart had surged in rising tempest and with passion’s flow, to ebb with yet fuller retrogression. Surely such were the words of this murmuring sea-song on the white midnight strand, which calmed, as with a magic anodyne, her restless, rebellious mood.

‘I have been wayward and wicked,’ she half sighed to herself, ‘false to my better self, to the teaching of a life, unmindful of my duty to my father, who loves me better than life, of my duty to One above, who has shielded and cherished me, all undeserving as I am, up to this hour. I will repent of my sin. I will abase myself, and by prayer and penitence seek strength where alone it can be found.’

It was long ere Antonia Frankston sought her couch; but she slept for the first time that night, since a serpent trail had passed over the Eden flowers of her trusting love, with an untroubled slumber and a resolved purpose.

Pale, but changed in voice and mien, was she when she joined her father at breakfast.

‘I see my little girl’s own face again,’ said Paul, as he embraced her, with tenderest solicitude in every line of his weather-beaten countenance. ‘I thought I had lost



her. She must not be hasty; she was never so before. All may come right in the end.'

'I have been a very naughty girl,' said she, with a quiet sob, 'ungrateful, too, and wicked. I have come to my senses again. It must have been the dreadful drought, I think, which is going to be the ruin of us all, body and mind. Fancy losing one's daughter, as well as one's money, because of a dry season!'

This small pleasantry did not excite Paul's risible muscles much, but he was more pleased with it than with a volume of epigrams. It showed that experienced mariner, accustomed to slightest indications of wind and wave, that a change of weather had set in. His soul rejoiced as he took his daughter in his arms and exclaimed, 'My darling, my darling, your mother is with the angels, but she watches over you still. Think of her when your old father is too far off or too dull to advise you. If she had lived——' But here there were tears in the old man's eyes, and the rugged features worked in such wise as to fashion a mask upon which no living man had ever gazed. There was a long confession. Once more every thought of Antonia Frankston's heart lay unfolded before her parent.

That morning, before driving, as usual, to the counting-house, Mr Frankston sought the Royal Hotel, and, upon business of importance, obtained an interview with Mr. Hardy Baldacre ere that 'talented but unscrupulous' aspirant had completed his breakfast.

So decided was the assurance imparted by his visitor that, with all possible appreciation of the honour conferred, Miss Frankston felt herself compelled to decline his very flattering offer, that Mr. Baldacre knew instinctively that any further investment of the Morahmee

fortress was vain, if not dangerous. He condoled with his early visitor about the state of the season, congratulating himself audibly that his runs were understocked, and that he had no bills to meet like some people; and finally accompanied Mr. Frankston to the door, with a friendly leave-taking, to be succeeded by a bitter oath as he lighted a cigar and paced the well-known balcony.

‘She has told her father. I saw the old boy was down to every move I had made. Knowing old shot, too, in spite of his politeness and humbug. I’d have backed myself, too, at a short price, if I had had only another week’s innings. They may have heard something, or that fool Neuchamp is coming down and leaving everything to go to the devil. I had a good show, too. I thought I held trumps. Never mind, there are lots of women everywhere. One more or less don’t make much difference. Of course, it was the “tin” that fetched me, but I don’t see that I need care so much about that. I think that I shall make tracks to-morrow.’

On the morning following that of Mr. Baldacre’s unlucky piece of information Paul Frankston lost no time in applying to headquarters for information. He, ‘with spirit proud and prompt to ire,’ would, a quarter of a century before, probably have smote first and inquired after. ‘But age had tamed the Douglas blood,’ and even if its current still coursed hotly on occasion, the experience of later manhood called loudly for plain proof and full evidence before he adopted the strange tale which had been told at his board.

Suspending all thought of what he might chance if *any man* were proved to have trifled with his darling’s heart, he simply wrote as follows :

SYDNEY, 10th April 18—.

DEAR ERNEST—We have heard a report down here—brought to our table, in fact, by Hardy Baldaire, a man you know a little—that you are engaged and about to be married shortly to a young lady, a cousin of your own, just arrived from England. Also that Miss Neuchamp left Sydney for Rainbar, after a week's stay, and was seen by him on the way there in a coach.

For reasons which can be hereafter explained, I wish you to send me a specific admission or denial of this statement. I will write you again upon receipt of your reply to this letter. I am, always yours sincerely,

PAUL FRANKSTON.

E. NEUCHAMP, Esq.

On the following evening, after sending this, the most laconic epistle which had ever passed between them, Paul no sooner beheld his daughter's face than he saw shining in her eyes the light of recovered trust, of renewed hope, of restored belief in happiness.

'She must have received a letter,' mused the sagacious parent. 'Where is it, my darling?' said he aloud.

'Where is what?' she replied, with a sweet air of embarrassment, pride, and mystery commingled.

'Of course you have had a letter, or heard some news. I took the chance of the little bird's whisper coming by post. I think I am right.'

'Here it is, you wicked magician. Antonia will never have another secret from her dear old father. What agonies I suffered for my hard-heartedness! And oh, what have I escaped!'

Here was the letter, with a mere stamp thereon, which contained such a fortune in happiness as should have entitled the Government to a round sum on the principle of legacy duty:

RAINBAR, 4th April 18—.

MY DEAR ANTONIA—This letter will probably reach Sydney some days, or weeks even, before a young lady, for whom I entreat

your friendship and kind offices. [H—m.] When I say that she is Augusta Neuchamp, my cousin, and my only relation in Australia, I feel certain that I need not further recommend her to you and the best of fathers and friends. [H—m.]

You will acknowledge her to be a refined and intelligent woman, that goes *sans phrase*, I should hope, and no truer heart, with more thoroughly conscientious acceptance of duty, ever dwelt in one of her sex. [H—m.]

But, writing to you with the confidence of old and tender friendship, I may as well state, delicately but decidedly, that Augusta and I have been utterly unsympathetic from our childhood, and must so remain to the end of the chapter. [Oh dear! surely I can't have read aright.]

Even at Rainbar, to which rude retreat she posted with her usual impetuosity, without giving me the opportunity of forbidding her, we had our old difficulty about preserving the peace (conversationally), and once or twice I thought we should have come to blows, as in our childish days. [Thank Heaven! Oh, oh!]

You know I am not given to dealing hardly with your sex, whatever may be their demerits, and of course I am not going to abuse my cousin in a strange land; but I am again trusting to your perfect comprehension of my real meaning, when I say that, companionably, Augusta appears to me to be the *only woman* in the world I cannot get on with. [Blessed girl, dear, charming Augusta—I love you already!]

Of course, as soon as she left Rainbar (we were on very short commons of politeness by that time) I resolved to write and ask you to take her in at Morahmee, and show her Sydney and our *monde*, in the existence of which she disbelieves. You must be prepared for her abusing everything and everybody. But I know no one who can more gently and effectually refute her prejudices than yourself, my dear Antonia. You even subjugated Jermyn Croker, I remember. By the bye, have him out to meet Augusta. She admires his file-firing style of attack. Perhaps they may neutralise each other's 'arms of precision.' [Do anything for her—ask the Duke to meet her, if she would like!]

I feel that I am writing a most indefensibly long letter. But I am very lonely, and rather melancholy, with ruin taking the place of rain—only one letter of difference—and advancing daily. Were it not so, I would, as the Irishman said, bring this letter

myself. Oh, for an hour again in the Morahmee verandah, with your father smoking, the stars, the sea, the soft tones of the music, of a voice always musical in my ear! Ah me! it will not bear thinking of. It is midnight now, yet I can see a cloud of dust rising, as my men bring an outlying lot of cattle to the yard. [‘Poor fellow! poor, poor Ernest!’ sighed the voice referred to.]

I know you will be kind and *forbearing* with Augusta. She will not remain long in Australia. I think you will appreciate the unquestionably strong points in her character. Of these she has many—too many, in fact. Apparently it is time to close this scrawl—the paper says so. ‘Pray for me, Gabrielle,’ your song says, and always trust me as your sincere friend,

ERNEST NEUCHAMP.

[Bless him, poor dear!]

‘So we are to have the honour of entertaining Ernest’s cousin, and not his future wife, it seems?’ said Mr. Frankston, also cheered up.

‘Never had the slightest thought of it, poor fellow,’ said Antonia, radiant with appreciation of the anti-pathetic Augusta. ‘How I could have been such a goose as to believe that wicked Hardy Baldacre, I can’t think. And, papa dear, I *might* have found myself pledged to marry him, doomed to endless misery, in my folly and madness. I shall never condemn other foolish girls again, whatever they may do.’

‘All’s well that ends well, darling,’ said the old man, with a grateful ring in his voice; ‘Paul Frankston and his own pet daughter are one in heart again. We don’t know what may happen when the rain comes.’

How joyous the world seemed after the explanation which Mr. Neuchamp’s letter indirectly afforded! Life was not a mistake after all. There was still interest in new books, pleasure in new music. A halo of dim wondrous glory was ever present during her nightly contemplation of sea and sky, in the lovely, all-cloudless

autumn nights. The moan of the restless surge-voices had again the friendly tone she had heard in them from childhood. The sea was again splendid with possible heroes and argosies; it was again the realm of danger, discovery, enchantment—not a storm-haunted, boding terror, with buried treasures and drowned seamen, with treacherous, fateful wastes into which the barque, freighted with Antonia Frankston's hopes, had been wafted forth to return no more.

It was during this enviably serene state of her mind that a note from the innocent cause of the first tragic scene which had invaded the idyl of Antonia Frankston's life appeared on the breakfast-table at Morahmee.

MIDDLEHAM, 20th April.

DEAR MISS FRANKSTON—My cousin Ernest, with whom I believe you are acquainted, made me promise to inform you of my proposed arrival in Sydney, on the conclusion of my visit to Mr. and Mrs. Middleton. That gentleman has kindly promised to accompany me to Sydney, which we shall reach (*D.V.*) by the five o'clock train on Friday next. I purpose taking up my abode at Petty's Hotel.—Permit me to remain, dear Miss Frankston, yours very truly,

AUGUSTA NEUCHAMP.

Of course nothing would content Antonia short of meeting at the station and carrying off to Morahmee, bag and baggage, this inestimable cousin, who had behaved so honourably, so perfectly.

Any other woman, with the mildest average of good looks, shut up in such a raft of a place as Rainbar metaphorically was, would have carried off Ernest, or any man of his age, easily and triumphantly. All the pleasant freedom of a cousin, all the provocation of a possible, unforbidden bride, the magic of old memories, the bond of perfect social equality as to rank and habitudes,—



what stupendous advantages! And yet she was so happily and delightfully constituted by nature that, in spite of dangerous proximity and all other advantages, she was, it was plain from his letter, the very last woman in the world whom he could have thought of marrying. O most excellent Augusta!

Paul, of course, after a show of deep consideration, came to the conclusion that Antonia's plan was the kindest, wisest, 'onliest' thing, under the circumstances. 'Take her home straight from the train. Bother Petty's—what's the use of her moping there, and spending her money? I don't think another girl for you to have a few talks with, and drives, and shopping, and Botanical Gardens, and Dorcas work together, could do you any harm, pet. So have her home quietly to-night. We must have a little dinner for her.'

Accordingly, when the punctual train arrived bearing Miss Neuchamp and her fortunes, she was astonished to hear Mr. Middleton exclaim, 'Why, there is Miss Frankston come to meet us! How do you do, Antonia, my dear? Allow me to make known Miss Neuchamp; probably you are already acquainted with one another by description.'

Miss Neuchamp's expectations can only be a matter of conjecture, but she was unaffectedly surprised at the apparition of this distinguished-looking girl, perfectly dressed and appointed, who stood on the platform, flanked by a liveried servant of London solidity of form and severe respectability of manner.

'Very, *very* happy to welcome you to Sydney, Miss Neuchamp,' said Antonia. 'Papa and I were so disappointed that we did not know of your address before you left for the bush. He won't hear of your going any-

where but to our house for the present. And, Mr. Middleton, I am pledged to bring you, as papa says we young ladies will be wrapped up in each other and leave him in solitude. I can command you, I know. Pray say you'll come, Miss Neuchamp.'

'If I may add my persuasion,' said Mr. Middleton, 'I could tell Miss Neuchamp that she could not act more discreetly for the present. I shall be delighted to wash all the dust out of my throat with some of your father's claret, Antonia. I'm your humble admirer, you know, when I'm away from home.'

'I shall be very happy to accept your hospitality, so kindly offered, for the present,' said Augusta, overpowered by briskness of attack and defection of allies.

The grave servant immediately addressed himself to the luggage and, handing the strange lady's nearest and dearest light weights into the carriage, remained behind to deposit one of Mr. Middleton's portmanteaus at the club, and to convey the remaining impedimenta to Morahmee per cab. As Miss Neuchamp ensconced herself in the yielding, ample cushions of the Morahmee carriage beside Antonia, and was borne along at a rapid pace, the mere rattling of the wheels upon the macadamised road was grateful and refreshing to her soul, as a reminiscence of the unquestioned proper and utterly befitting, from which she had hitherto considered herself to be hopelessly sundered by the whole breadth of ocean.

## CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN Miss Neuchamp found herself installed in a large, cool upper chamber at Morahmee with a glorious view of the harbour, while on her table stood a great rapturous bouquet all freshly gathered, roses intermingled with delicate greenhouse buds, she commenced to wonder whether all her previously formed ideas of Australia were about to be seriously modified.

A good sound reserve of prejudice reassured her, and she bided her time. She had tasted the fullest measure of comfort perceivable in Australian country life at the house of Mr. Middleton, where she had sojourned several weeks. Now she was about to experience whatever best and pleasantest the metropolis could afford.

Mr. Frankston had brought home with him Count von Schätterheims and Mr. Jermyn Croker, so that he and Mr. Middleton, having endless semi-stock and station lore to interchange, each of the ladies was provided with a cavalier.

The Count, who had been informed by Paul that Miss Neuchamp was an English heiress of vast wealth, travelling to indulge her eccentric insular taste, paid great attention to that young lady, cutting in from time to time, to the speechless wrath and exasperation of Jermyn.

Croker, who renewed his former acquaintance with great success.

The fair Augusta was entertained, and not wholly displeased, with their manifest admiration.

As the verandah was voted by far the pleasantest place after dinner, the whole party adjourned to this invaluable retreat, where Paul and his friend were permitted to light their cigars, and all joined in conversation with unaffected freedom impossible in a drawing-room.

‘Sing something, my darling,’ said the old man, ‘and then, perhaps, the Count will give us that new song of his, which I hear all Sydney is raving about.’

As the rich tones of the grand Erard came forth to them, luxuriously softened by the intervening distance, Miss Neuchamp tasted a pleasure from which she had for an age, it would seem, been debarred. She did not herself perform with more than the moderate degree of success which can be attained by those who, without natural talent, have received thoroughly good teaching. But her training, at least, enabled her to appreciate the delicacy of Miss Frankston’s touch, her finished and rare execution, and the true yet deep feeling with which she rendered the most simple melodies as well as the most complicated operatic triumphs.

Somewhat to the discomposure of the Count, who had commenced to believe the opportunity favourable, she rose, and with an expression of delight passed on to Antonia’s side. Miss Neuchamp had seen too many counts to attach importance to that particular grade of continental rank; and this particular specimen of the order she held in fixed distrust, derived from the recollection of comments to which she had listened at Rainbar.

'*La belle Anglaise* prefers music to your compliments, Count,' said Mr. Croker.

'*Chacun à son tour*,' replied the injured diplomatist. 'Dey are both ver good in dere vay.'

Whatever might be the Count's shortcomings, a deficiency of self-control could hardly be reckoned among them. He twirled his enormous moustache, condoled with Paul and Mr. Middleton, and explained that his steward in Silesia had written him accounts of an unusually wet season.

'Ah, dat is de condrey! You should see him, my dear Monsieur Paul: such grops, such pasdures, such vool, so vine as de zilks.'

'How about labour?' said Mr. Middleton. 'I suppose you are not bothered as we are every now and then with a short supply, and half of that bad?'

'De bauer—vat you call "beasand" in my condrey—he vork for you all de yahres of his live, and pray Gott for your brospérité—it is his brivilech to be receive wid joys and danks. De bauer, oh, de bauer is goot man!'

'I wish our fellows received their lot with joy and thanks; half of my Steam Plains shepherds have gone off to these confounded diggings. But don't your men emigrate to America now and then? I thought half Germany went there.'

'I vill dell you one dale,' said the Count earnestly. 'I had one hauptman, overzeer, grand laboureur, ver goot man—he is of lofdy indelligence, he reat, he dinks mooch, he vill go to Amerika. I consoolt mit my steward, he say Carl Steiger is ver goot, he is so goot as no oder mans what we have not got. I say, "Ingrease his vages, once, twyei, dree dime—he reach de vonderful som of *fivedeen*

*bount* per yahr. He go no more. De golten demdation is doo crade; he abandon his shpirit-dask to leat man-kint, he glass my vools now dill his lives is ofer.”’

‘Ha! he wanted a summer on the wallaby track to open his mind,’ said Mr. Middleton; ‘that would have been a “wanderyahr” with different results, I am afraid. But I really think many of our fellows would do better if they had more of the thrift and steady resolve of your countrymen, Count. I remember when wages were much lower than now in the colony, and when the men really saved something worth while, besides working more cheerfully. Don’t you, Croker?’ But Mr. Croker had departed in the midst of the Count’s story, and was charming Miss Neuchamp with such delightful depreciation of the Australias, and all that in them is, that she became rapidly confirmed in her first opinion, formed soon after her arrival, that he was the best style of man she had as yet met in the colony. Mr. Croker, on his side, declared himself to be encouraged and refreshed by thus meeting with a genuine English lady not afraid to speak out her mind with respect to this confounded country, and its ways, means, and inhabitants.

The Count, fearing that the evening would be an unprofitable investment of his talents and graces, particularly in the matter of Miss Neuchamp, by whom he was treated with studied coldness, departed after having sung his song. This effort merely recalled to Augusta some occasion when she had heard it very much better performed in the Grand Opera at Paris. Jermyn Croker, who had never heard it before, openly depreciated the air, the words, the expression, and execution. With more than one household languishing for his presence, this was a state of matters not to be continued, so the Count, with



graceful apologies and vows of pressing engagements, took his departure.

‘You and I, Middleton, can go home to the club together, now that the *chevalier d’industrie*—beg your pardon, Frankston—I mean, of the Order of the Legion of Honour, Kaiser Fritz, and all his other orders, medals, and decorations—— But I daresay the first represents his truest claim.’

‘You are always charitably well informed, we know that, Croker,’ said Mr. Middleton. ‘Mind, I don’t put my trust in princes or counts of *his* sort. I wonder how he gets along. Still swimmingly?’

‘Don’t think the fellow has a shilling in the world myself—never did,’ replied Croker, with cheerful disbelief. ‘But from what I heard the other day, he will have to make his grand *coup* soon, now that it’s known his chance of marrying Harriet Folleton is all up.’

‘Is it finally unsettled, then, Mr. Croker?’ said Antonia. ‘Every one said she admired him so much.’

‘She is quite equal to that or any other madness, I believe,’ said the well-informed Jermyn; ‘and, with her mother’s extraordinary folly to back her, there is no limit to the insanity she is capable of. But the old man *has* a little sense—people who have made a pot of money often have—and he stopped the whole affair last week.’

Mr. Neuchamp was, perhaps, more disturbed in mind than he had ever been since his arrival in Australia when he received the unusually laconic letter referred to from Paul Frankston. Surprise, anger, uncertainty by turns took possession of his soul. A wholly new and strangely mingled sensation arose in his mind. Had he misinterpreted his own emotions as well as those of

Antonia? That such was the case as to his own feeling was evidenced by his sudden and unreasonable rage when he thought of Hardy Baldacre in the character of an accepted suitor for the hand of the unconventional, innocent girl whose half-childish, half-womanly expressions of wonder, admiration, dislike, or approval, called forth by incidents in their daily studies, he could *now* so clearly remember.

Had he, then, won that priceless gem, the unbought love of a pure and loving heart—no fleeting fancy, born of vanity or caprice, but the deeply-rooted, sacred, life-long devotion of an untarnished virgin-soul, of a cultured and lofty intellect?

This heavenly jewel had been suspended by a crowned angel above his head, and had he not, with sordid indifference, bent earthward, all unheeding, save of hard and anxious travail? He had narrowed his mind to bees and kine, dry seasons and wet, all the merest workaday vulgarities of short-sighted mortals, resolute only in the pursuit of dross.

Had he, from neglect, heedlessness, absence, however indispensable, chilled the fond ardour of that lonely heart, cast the priceless treasure into careless or unworthy hands? Who was he, that a girl so much courted, so richly dowered in every way, as Antonia Frankston, should wait till youth was over for his deliberate approval? And yet, if she *had* delayed but for a short while longer—till *the rain came*, in fact. Ah me! was not all the Australian world waiting with exhausted, upturned eyes for that crowning, long-delayed blessing? Fancy such a reason being proffered in England. Weddings, in that happy land, were occasionally postponed till a semblance of fine weather might be calculated upon, but surely only

in this antipodean land of contrast and confusion did any one defer the great question of his life until the *departure* of fine weather. Antonia was, doubtless, besieged by hosts of suitors, among them this infernal, lying scoundrel of a cad, Hardy Baldaire, besides Jermyn Croker, the Count, Hartley Selmore, and numberless others. Madness was in his thoughts—he would go down, rain or no rain, wet or dry, tempest or zephyr, hurricane or calm. He would hunt for the ruffian Baldaire, and slay him where they met.

Nevertheless he must at once answer Paul's letter, which he did to the effect that, 'He wondered that his old friends should believe any mere fabrications, unsupported by testimony, to his prejudice. Not that there was anything discreditable about the report, if true; but this was *not* true. His cousin, with misplaced heroism, had visited him in his solitude; a refined and highly educated woman, as would be apparent to all, she certainly was. But as a *wife* he had never thought of her, nor could he, if their existence ran parallel for years.' Having despatched the letter, Ernest felt easier in mind, more removed from that condition the most irritating and intolerable of all, the accusation of wrong without the power of justification. It was hard to resist an almost uncontrollable desire to rush down to Sydney then and there to set himself right with his friends. But, as he ran over the obstacles to such a course, it seemed, on cooler thought, to be unadvisable in every way. First, there was the extreme difficulty of performing the journey: he had not a horse at Rainbar capable of carrying him across to the mail station. When he got there it was problematical whether the contractor was running a wheel mail or not. It would be undesirable, even ridiculous, to find

himself a couple of hundred miles from home, stranded on the endless, dry, hopeless plain. To make a lengthened stay in Sydney, should he get there, was not to be thought of under his present circumstances of debt and anxiety. 'No,' he said, as he crushed the feeling back with a self-repression more nearly allied to heroism than mere ostentatious efforts of courage, 'no, my colours are nailed to the masthead, and there shall they hang till the cry of "victory" is once more heard, or till the fight is lost beyond mortal hope.'

So, sadly yet steadfastly, Ernest Neuchamp turned himself to the monotonous tasks which, like those of sailors on a desert island, or of the crew of a slowly-sailing ship, were yet carried on with daily, hopeless regularity. Still the ashen-gray pastures became more withered and deathlike. Still the sad, staggering lines of cattle paced in along the well-worn dusty trails to their watering-places, and paced back like bovine processions after witnessing the funeral obsequies of individuals of their race, which experience, in truth, was daily theirs.

Then the diet, once not distasteful to the much-enduring palate of youth, became wellnigh intolerable: the flaccid unfed meat, the daily bread with never a condiment, the milkless tea, the utter absence of all fruit, vegetable, herb, or esculent. Truly, as in those ancient days when a pastoral people record their sorrowful chronicles of the dry and thirsty region where no water is, 'the famine was sore in the land.'

At this time, so dreary, so endless, so crushing in its isolated, unchanging, helpless misery, Ernest was unutterably thankful for the hope and consolation which his studious habits afforded him. His library, the day's work done, filled up his lonely evening as could no other em-

ployment possible under the circumstances. He ransacked his moderate references for records of similar calamities in all lands which, unlike the 'happy isles' of Britain, are from time to time invaded with drought, the chief agent in all the recorded wholesale destruction of animal life. He noted with painstaking and laborious accuracy the duration, the signs, the consequences, the termination of such dread seasons. From old books of Australian exploration he learned, almost by heart, the sad experiences of the pioneers of the land when they stood face to face with what to them were new and terrible foes.

'It is hard,' said he to himself, as he paced his room at midnight, after long hours of close application to such studies, 'it is hard and depressing to me, and to many a wretched colonist who has worked longer and has more on the hazard than I, to see the fruit of our labours slowly, pitilessly absorbed by this remorseless season. But what, after all, is a calamity which can be measured, like this, by a money standard, compared to one which, like this latest famine in Hindostan, counts its *human* victims by tens of thousands, by millions? See the dry record of a food failure, which comprehends the teeming human herds which cover the soil more thickly than even our poor starving flocks!

'Can we realise thousands of lowly homes where the mother sits enfeebled and spectral beside her perishing babes, whose eyes ask for the food which she cannot grant; where the frenzied peasant rushes, in the agony of despair, from his cabin that he may not hear the hunger cries, the death groans of his wife and babes; where the dead lie unburied; where the beast of prey alone roams satiated and lordly; where nature mourns

like a maniac mother with tears of blood for her murdered offspring?

‘Such is not, may never be, the fate of this wide, rich, peaceful land, vast and wondrous in its capabilities in spite of temporary disasters. Let us take heart. Our losses, our woes, are trifling in comparison with the world’s great miseries. We are, in comparison, but as children who lose their holiday gifts of coin or cakes. Our lives, our health and strength, are all untouched. We have hope still for our unbartered heritage, the stronger for past dangers of storm and tide. The world is yet before us. There are other seas, untried and slumbering oceans, where our bark may yet ride with joyous outspread sail. Let us still labour and endure, until Fate, compelled by our steadfastness, shall be once more propitious.

‘*Si fractus illabitur orbis  
Impavidum ferient ruinae.*

I hardly expected to be quoting Horace at Rainbar, but the old boy probably had some experience of untoward seasons, sunshiny desolation, like this of ours. I don’t know whether “*Impavidum*” applies strictly to any one but Levison. I am afraid that the “*fractus orbis*” pertains to our cosmos of credit, which, shattered to its core, will strike us all soon and put us to the proof of our philosophy.’

A trilling distraction was created about this time, much to Ernest’s relief, by the arrival of Mr. Cottonbush, who had received instructions from Mr. Levison to muster, brand, and take delivery of the small herd of cattle, the single flock of sheep, and the lot of horses which that far-seeing speculator had purchased from the brothers Freeman. This pastoral plenipotentiary, a



wiry, reticent individual, utterly impervious to every wile and stratagem which the art of man in Australia had hitherto evolved from the very complicated industry of stock-raising, first informed the Freemans of his mission, producing a written authority with the awe-striking signature of Abstinens Levison, and then reported himself to Mr. Neuchamp.

‘It is a bad season, sir,’ he said, in answer to that gentleman’s greeting, which of course comprehended the disastrous state of the weather, ‘and many a one wouldn’t bother mustering these three or four hundred crawling cattle. They might be all dead in three months for all we can see. But Mr. Levison isn’t like any one else. He sends me a line to do this, or go there, and I always do it without troubling about the reasons. He finds them for the lot of us, and pretty fair ones they generally are when time brings ‘em out.’

‘I think *I* know why he made this bargain,’ said Ernest, ‘and I must say I wonder more about it every day. But I am so far of your opinion, now that I am becoming what you call an “old hand,” that I shall imitate your example in letting Mr. Levison’s reasons work themselves out in practice.’

‘That’s the best way, sir,’ assented the colonel of cavalry under this pastoral general of division. ‘I’ve never done anything but report and obey orders since I’ve been with Levison, this many a year. I used to talk and argue a bit with him at first. I never do now, though he’s a man that will always hear what you’ve got to say, in case he might pick something out of it. But I never knew him alter his mind after he’d got all the information he wanted. So it’s lost time talking to him.’

‘And what do *you* think about this terrible season?’

asked Ernest, anxiously looking at this iron man of the desert, whose experience was to his, he could *now* in this hour of wreck and ruin realise, as immeasurably superior as the grizzled second mate's to the cabin boy's when the tempest cries aloud with voice of death and the hungry caverns of the eternal deep are disclosed.

'It's bad enough,' assented Mr. Cottonbush thoughtfully, 'bad enough; and there's many a one will remember it to his dying day. In some places they'll lose most of their stock before the winter's on for want of feed, and all the rest, when it *does* come, from the cold. There were ten thousand fat sheep (or supposed to be fat) of Lateman's caught in the Peechelbah mallee the other day as they were going a short cut. When I say "caught," the water had dried up that they reckoned on, and was only found out when they was half way through. The sheep went mad and wouldn't drive. So did the chap in charge, very nigh. When he got out he had only some four thousand three hundred odd left. That was a smash, wasn't it?'

'Sheep are not so bad as cattle in one way,' said Mr. Neuchamp; 'you can travel them and steal grass. A good many people seem unprincipled enough to resort to the meanness of filching from their neighbours and the country generally what no man can spare in this awful time.'

'Well,' said Mr. Cottonbush, smiling and wincing slightly, 'it ain't quite the clean potato, of course; but if your sheep's dying at home, what can you do? Every man for himself, you know; and you can't let 'em stop on the run and die before your eyes. We've had to do a bit of it ourselves. But the old man, he bought two or three whacking big bits of country in the Snowy

Mountains, Long Plains, the Gulf, Yarrangobilly, and two or three more, enough to feed all the sheep in the country, and started ours for it directly after shearing, while the roads were good. *He* knew what was coming and provided in time, same as he always does. Blessed if he didn't lease a lot of the country he could spare to people who were hard pushed and came late, so he got his own share cheap.'

'And was there abundance of grass and water?'

'Green grass two feet high, running creeks all the summer, enough to make your mouth water. If we get rain down before the snow comes next month our flocks will come back better than they went, and with half as much wool again as the plains sheep.'

That day Mr. Cottonbush informed the Freeman family that, inasmuch as the Rainbar stockyard was a strong and secure enclosure, and as his employer, Mr. Levison, was a very particular man in having cattle that he bought properly branded up, he didn't like any to be left over, and they must yard every mother's son of 'em.

So, as Mr. Neuchamp had kindly given permission for his yard to be used, the entire Freeman clan, including a swarm of brown-faced, bare-legged urchins, arrived on the following day with the whole of their herd. It was a strange sight, and not without a proportion of dramatic interest. The cattle were so emaciated that they could hardly walk; many of them staggered and fell. In truth, as they moved up in a long woebegone procession, they looked like a ghostly protest against man's lack of foresight and Heaven's wrath. The horses were so weak from starvation that they could barely carry their riders. One youngster was fain to jump off his colt, that exhausted animal having

come to a dead halt, and drive him forward with the cattle.

Even the men and the boys had a wan and withered look. Not that they had been on short commons, but, dusty, sunburned, and nervously anxious to secure every animal that could walk to the yard, they harmonised very fittingly with their kine.

When they arrived at the yard Mr. Cottonbush counted them carefully in, and then signified to the vendors that, in his opinion, it would be wise of them to go back and make a final 'scrape,' as he expressed it, of their pasture-ground, lest there might inadvertently have been any left behind.

'That sort of thing always leads to trouble, you know,' said he; 'there's a sort of doubt which were branded and which were not. Now, Mr. Levison bought every hoof you own, no milkers reserved and all that; he don't believe in having any of the best cattle kept back. So you'd better scour up every beast you can raise before we begin to brand. We can tail this mob, now they're here.'

This supplementary proceeding resulted in the production of about thirty head of cattle, among which there curiously happened to be, by accident, half a dozen cows considerably above the average in point of breeding and value.

This very trifling matter of a 'cockatoo's' muster having been thus concluded, all the horses having been yarded, and the flock of sheep driven up—Mr. Levison having made it a *sine quâ non* that he would have all or none—the fires were lighted and the brands put in.

To the wild astonishment of the Freemans, Mr. Cottonbush, having put the HNE brand in the fire, commenced

to place that conjoined hieroglyph upon every cow, calf, bullock, and steer, assisted by Mr. Windsor, Charley Banks, and the black boys.

‘Why, “the cove” ain’t bought ‘em, surely?’ said Joe Freeman, with a look of much distrust and disapproval. ‘Where’s he to get the sugar, I want to know; or else it’s a “plant” between him and old Levison.’

‘When the stock’s counted and branded you’ll get your cheque,’ said the imperturbable manager; ‘that’s all you’ve got to bother your head about. It’s no business of yours, if you’re paid, whether Levison chooses to sell ‘em, or boil ‘em, or put ‘em in a glass case.’

‘Well, I’m blowed,’ said Bill Freeman, ‘if we ain’t regularly sold. If I’d a-known as they was a-comin’ here, I’d have seen Levison in the middle of a mallee scrub with his tongue out for water before I’d have sold him a hoof. One comfort: the cash is all right, and half of these crawlers will die before spring.’

‘Not if rain comes within a month,’ said Mr. Cottonbush cheerily. ‘You’d be surprised what a fortnight will do for stock in these places, and the grass grows like a hotbed. These cattle are smallish and weak, but not so badly bred. They’ll fill out wonderfully when they get their fill. You’d better wait and see them counted, and then you can have your cheque.’

Jack Windsor and Charley Banks worked with a will, so did the younger members of the yeomanry plantation. The grown cattle were of course pen-branded. By night-fall every one was marked very legibly and counted out. Four hundred and seventy head of cattle over six months old, eighty-four horses, and twelve hundred mixed sheep, principally weaners. These last were fire-branded on

the side of the face, provided with a shepherd, and kept near home.

The necessary preliminaries being concluded, Mr. Cottonbush handed a cheque, at the prices arranged, to Abraham Freeman, and turned the horses and cattle out of the yard.

‘You haven’t a horn or a hoof on Rainbar now,’ said he composedly; ‘perhaps you have ’em in a better place, in your breeches pockets; and remember I’ll be up here next November, or else Mr. Levison, to take up your selections as agreed. Then, I suppose, you’ll be fixing yourself down upon some other miserable squatter. You’re bound not to stop here, you know.’

Having thus accomplished his mission clearly and unmistakably, Mr. Cottonbush, whose acquaintance Ernest had first made at Turonia when he took delivery of Mr. Drifter’s cattle, declared his intention of starting at day-break. Waste of time was never laid to the charge of Mr. Levison’s subordinates. ‘Like master like man’ is a proverb of unquestionable antiquity. There is more in it than appears upon the surface. Whatever might have been the moulding power, it is certain that his managers, agents, and overseers attached great importance to those attributes of punctuality, foresight, temperance, and thrift which were dear to the soul of Abstinens Levison.

‘I’m glad these crawlers of cattle are branded up and done with while it’s dry, likewise the horses. All this kind of work is so much easier and better done in dry weather,’ said the relaxing manager. ‘They’re not a very gay lot to look at now. But I shouldn’t wonder to see you knocking ten pounds a head out of some of those cats of steers before this day two years.’



‘Ten pounds a head!’ echoed Ernest. ‘Why not say twenty, while you’re about it?’

‘You don’t believe it,’ said Mr. Cottonbush calmly, rubbing his tobacco assiduously in his hands preparatory to lighting his pipe. ‘Levison writes that stock are going up in Victoria to astonishing prices, and that what they’ll reach, if the gold keeps up, no man can tell. So your cattle *might* fetch twenty pounds after all.’

‘What would you advise me to do with the Freemans’ stock, now that I have got them?’ asked Ernest.

‘If I was in your place,’ said Mr. Cottonbush judiciously, ‘I should stick to the cattle, for every one of them, down to the smallest calf, will be good money when the rain comes. The sheep also you may as well keep: they’ll pay their own wages if you put ’em out on a bit of spare back country, and there’s plenty that your cattle never go near. You could bring ’em in to shear them, and they’ll increase and grow into money fast enough. You might have ten thousand sheep on Rainbar and never know it.’

‘I don’t like sheep much,’ said Ernest; ‘but these are very cheap, if they live, and there is plenty of room, as you say. And the horses?’

‘Sell every three-cornered wretch of ’em—a set of upright-shouldered, useless mongrels—directly you get a chance,’ said Mr. Cottonbush with unusual energy of speech. ‘And now you’re able to clear the run of ’em, being your own, which you never could have done if they remained theirs. You’d have had young fellows coming for this colt or that filly till your head was gray.’

‘I hope not,’ said Ernest, laughing; ‘but I am glad to have all the stock and land of Rainbar in my own hands once more.’

Mr. Cottonbush departed at dawn, and once more Ernest was alone in the gray-stricken, accursed waste, wherein nor grass grew nor water ran, nor did any of these everyday miracles of Nature appear likely again to be witnessed by despairing man.

Still passed by the hungry hordes of travelling sheep, still the bony skeletons of the passing cattle herds. No rain, no sign of rain! All pastoral nature, brute and human, appeared to have been struck with the same blight, and to be forlorn and moribund. The station cattle became weaker and less capable of exertion; 'lower,' as Charley Banks called it, as the cold autumn nights commenced to exhibit their keenness. The Free-mans relinquished all control over their cattle, and chucked over the weakly state of the Rainbar herd.

The autumn had commenced, a peerless season in all respects save in the vitally indispensable condition of moisture. The mornings were crisp, with a suggestive tinge of frost, the nights absolutely cold, the days, as usual, cloudless, bright, and warm. If there was any variation it was in the direction of a lowering, overcast, cloudy interval, when the bleak winds moaned bodingly, but led to no other effect than to sweep the dead leaves and dry sticks, which had so long passed for earth's usual covering, into heaps and eddying circular lines. The roughening coats on the feeble frames of the stock, now enduring the slow torture of the cold in the lengthening nights, told a tale of coming collapse, of consummated, unquestioned ruin. Daily did Ernest Neuchamp dread to rise, to pass hours of hopeless despondency among these perishing forms, dying creatures roaming over a dead earth during their brief term of survival! Daily did he almost come to loathe the sight of the unpyting

sun, which, like a remorseless enemy, spared not one beam of his burning rays, veiled not one glare of his deadly glance. He had an occasional reminiscence of the steady, reassuring tones, the unwavering purpose of which abode with the very presence of Abstinens Levison. But for these he felt at times as though he could have distrusted the justice of an overruling Power, have cursed the hour of his birth, and delivered himself over to despair and reprobation.

While Mr. Neuchamp was not far removed from this most unusual and decidedly unphilosophical state of mind, it so chanced on a certain afternoon (it was that of Wednesday, the eighteenth day of May, as was long after remembered) that he and Jack Windsor were out together, a few miles from home, upon the ironical but necessary mission of procuring a 'fat beast.' This form of speech may be thought to have savoured too much of the wildly improbable. The real quest was, of course, for an animal in such a state of comparative emaciation as should not preclude his carcass for being converted into human food. The meat was not palatable, but it supported life in the hardy Anglo-Saxon frame. It was all they had, and they were constrained to make the best of it.

'Look at these poor devils of cattle,' said Jack, pointing to a number of hide-bearing anatomies moving their jaws mechanically over the imperceptible pasture. 'They have water, but what the deuce they find to eat I can't see. There's that white steer, that red cow, and one or two more, with their jaws swelled up. There's plenty of 'em like that.'

'From what cause?' asked Mr. Neuchamp. 'Cancer is not becoming epidemic, I hope.'

'It comes from the shortness of the feed, *I* think,'

returned Jack; 'you see the poor creatures keep licking and picking every time they see a blade of grass, if it's only a quarter of an inch long; half their time they miss their aim and rattle their jaws together with nothing between them. That's what hurts 'em, I expect, and after a bit it makes their heads swell.'

'I wonder what they would think in England of such an injury, occurring in what we always believed to be a rich pastoral country.'

'So it is, sir, when the season's right. I expect in England you have your bad seasons in another way, and get smothered and flooded out with rain; and the crops are half rotten; and the poor man (I suppose he is *really* a poor man there, no coasting up one side of a river and down the other for six months, with free rations all the time) gets tucked up a bit.'

'As you say, Jack, there are bad seasons, which mean bad harvests, in England,' answered Ernest, always inclined to the diversion of philosophical inquiry; 'and the poor man there, as you say, properly so called, inasmuch as he requires more absolute shelter, more sufficient clothes in the terrible winter of the north, than our friends who pursue the ever-lengthening but not arduous track of the wallaby in Australia. They may in England, and do occasionally, I grieve to say, if unemployed and therefore unfed, actually *starve to death*. But what are those cattle just drawing in?'

'Those belong to a lot that keeps pretty well back,' answered Jack, 'and they're different in their way from these cripples we've been looking at, as they've had something to *eat*, but they're pretty well choked for a drink. I don't know when they've had one. That's how it is, you see, sir; half the cattle's afraid to go

away for the water, and the rest won't leave what little feed there is till they're nearly mad with drouth. It's cruel work either way. I'm blest if that wasn't a drop of rain !'

This sudden and rare phenomenon caused Ernest to take a cursory examination of the sky, which he had long forborne to regard with hope or fear. It was clouded over. But such had been the appearance of the firmament scores of times during the last six months. The air was still, sultry, and full of the boding calm which precedes a storm. Such signs had been successfully counterfeited, as Ernest bitterly termed it, once a month since the last half-forgotten showery spring. He had observed a halo round the moon on the previous night. There had been dozens of dim circular rings round that planet all the long summer through. The rain was certainly falling now. So had it commenced, on precisely such a day, with the same low banks of clouds, many a time and oft, and stopped abruptly in about twenty minutes, the clouds disappearing, and the old presentment reverting to a staring blue sky, a mocking, unveiled sun therein, with the suddenness of a transformation scene in a pantomime.

'I think that spotted cow looks as near meat as anything we're likely to get, sir,' said Jack Windsor, interrupting the train of distrustful reverie. 'It begins to look as if it meant it. Lord send we may get well soaked before we get home !'

Mr. Windsor's pious aspiration was appropriate this time. They reaped the benefit of a genuine and complete saturation before they reached the yard with the small lot of cattle they were compelled to take in for companionship to their 'fat beast.' There was no appearance

of haste about the rain, no tropical violence, no water-spout business. It trickled down in slow, monotonous, still, and settled drizzle, much as it might have done in North Britain. It only did not stop; that was all. It was hopefully continuous all the evening. And when Mr. Neuchamp opened his casement at midnight he thankfully listened to the soaking, ceaseless downpour, which seemed no nearer a sudden conclusion than during the first hour.

Before dawn Mr. Neuchamp was pacing his verandah, having darted out from his couch the very moment that he awoke. The temperature had sensibly fallen; so had the clouds, which were low and black; and still the rain streamed down more heavily than at first. There was apparently no alteration likely to take place during the day. The water commenced to flow in the small channels. The minor watercourses, the gullies, and creeks were filling. Wonder of wonders—it was a settled, set-in, hopelessly wet day! What a blessed and wonderful change from last week! Ernest had a colloquy with Charley Banks about things in general, and then permitted himself a whole day's rest—reading a little, ciphering a little, and looking up his correspondence, which had fallen much into arrear. As the day wore on the rain commenced to show determination, heavily, hour after hour, with steady fall, saturating the darkened earth, no longer dusty, desolate, hopelessly barren. The gaping fissures were filled. The long disused ruts and gutters ran full and foaming down to their ultimate destination, the river. That great stream refused to acknowledge any immediate change of level from so inconsiderable a cause as a rainfall so far from its source. But, doubtless, as Charley Banks pointed



out, in a week or more it would 'come down' in might and majesty, when the freshets at the head waters should have time to gather forces and swell the yellow tide. It was well if there was not then a regular flood, but that would do them no harm; might swamp out the Freemans, perhaps, but as long as Tottie wasn't drowned, and the old woman, the rest of the family might be swept down to Adelaide for all he, Charley, cared. So let it rain till all was blue. There was no mistake this time. It was a general rain. We should have forty-eight hours of it before it stopped. Every hoof of stock was off the frontage now and away back, where there was good shelter and a trifle of feed. In a fortnight after this there would be good 'bite' all over Rainbar run. We should have a little comfort in our lives now. What a pull it was, that old Cottonbush had branded up those last stores before the rain came.

Thus Mr. Charles Banks, jubilantly prophetic, with the elasticity of youth, having thrown off at one effort all the annoyance and privation of the famine year, was fully prepared for an epoch of marvels and general prosperity.

The day ended as it had commenced. There was not a moment's cessation from the soaking, pouring, saturating, dripping downpour of heaven's precious rain. 'As the shower upon the mown grass,' saith the olden Scripture of the day of David the King. Doubtless the great City of Palaces was erst surrounded by shaven lawns, by irrigated fields and gardens. But on the skirts of the far-stretching yellow deserts, tenanted then as now by the wild tribes, to whom pasture for their camels and asses, and horses and sheep, was as the life-blood of their veins, doubtless there were thousands of

leagues all barren, baked sterility, until the long-desired rain set in, when, as if by magic, herbs and waving grains and flowerets fair sprang up, and rejoiced the hearts of the tribe, from the silver-bearded sheik to the laughing child.

So it would be at Rainbar. Ernest knew this from many a conversation which he had had upon the subject with Jack Windsor and Charley Banks. In this warm, dry-soiled country, the growth of pasture under favourable circumstances is well-nigh incredible. Nature adapts herself to the most widely differing conditions of existence with amazing fertility of resource. In more temperate zones the partial heat which withers the flower and the green herb when cut down, slays the plant and destroys germination in the seed for evermore. Here, in the wild waste, when the fierce and burning blast revels over scorched brown prairies, and the whirlwind and the sand column dance together over heated sands, the plant life is well and truly adapted to the strange soil, the stranger clime. The tall grasses grow hard and gray, or faint yellow, under the daily desiccation which spares no tender growth; but they remain nutritive and life-sustaining for an incredible period, if but the necessary cloud water can be supplied at long intervals. Then the hard-pushed pastoral colonist, when he found that his flocks had bared to famine pitch the pastures within reach of the watercourses, which were his sole dependence in the earlier days, was compelled to resort to the most ancient practice of well-digging, of which he might have gained the idea from the familiar records of a hard-set pastoral people in the sandy wastes of Judea. Receding to the wide plains and waterless forests of the vast region which lay cruelly distant from

any known stream or fountain, which was in summer regularly abandoned by the aboriginal denizens of the land, he sank, at much expense, wells of great depth—at first with uncertain result; but, though much of the water thus painfully obtained—for from three to five hundred pounds for two to three hundred feet sinking was no uncommon expense in a single well—was brackish, much salt, still progress was made. The stock was enabled in the midst of summer heat or protracted autumn drought to feed upon these previously locked-up pastures, upon the saline herbs and plants, the nutritious, aromatic shrubs peculiar to this land, where no white man had ever before seen stock except in winter.

By degrees it began to be asserted that ‘back country,’ *i.e.* the lands remote from all visible means of subsistence for flocks and herds, as far as water was concerned, paid the speculative pastoral occupier better than the ‘frontage,’ or land in the neighbourhood of permanent creeks, and of the few well-known rivers. *There* roamed that unconscionable beast of prey, the all-devouring free selector. He could select the choicest bends, the richest flats, the deepest river reaches, even where the squatter had fenced or enclosed. For were not the waters free to all? He naturally appropriated the best and most tempting conjunctions of ‘land and water.’ These were precisely those which were most profitable, most necessary, occasionally most indispensable to the proprietor of the run.

But it was not so with the back blocks. There capital yet retained much of its ancient supremacy. The wielder of that implement or weapon was enabled to cause his long-silent wilderness to blossom as the rose,

by means of dams and wells. He was in a position also to drive off, keep out, and withstand the invading pseudo-grazier, with his sham purchases and his wrongful grass rights.

Thus, by a wise provision of the Land Act, all improvements of a value exceeding forty pounds sterling, when placed by the pastoral tenant upon the Crown lands which he was facetiously supposed to rent, protect the lands upon which they stand, or which, in the case of a well, they underlie; that is to say, a five-hundred-guinea well or a hundred-pound dam cannot be free-selected or taken cool possession of as a conditional purchase by the land marauder of the period. Some people might see a slight flavour of fairness in this provision which has not always in other colonies, Victoria notably, been granted by the democratic wolf to the conservative lamb. However the Government of New South Wales may have erred in other respects, it has in the main so far ruled the outnumbered pastoralists with a courtesy, fairness, and freedom from small greed such as might be expected from one body of gentlemen in responsible dealing with a class of similar social rank.

One successful well or dam, therefore, converted a block of country hitherto useless for nine months out of the twelve into a run capable of carrying ten thousand sheep all the year round. Of course, any portion of the Crown estate the conditional purchaser might 'take up,' or, without notice, occupy. But where was he to procure his water from? He had not often five hundred pounds, or if so, did not 'believe' in such solemn disbursement for 'mere improvements.' Therefore he still haunted, cormorant-like, the rivers and creeks—the 'permanent water' of the colonist. To the younger sons of ancient

houses, scions of Howards, Somersets, and of the untitled nobility of Britain, he conceded the right to live like hermits in the Thebaid, upon their artificially and expensively watered back blocks.

A special peculiarity of the ocean-like plains of inmost Australia is the miraculous growth of vegetation after the profuse irrigation which invariably succeeds a drought. In the warm dry earth, now converted into a bed of red or black mud, saturated to its lowest inch, and rich for procreation of every green thing, lies a hoard of seeds of wondrous number and variety of species. Broad and green, in a few days, as the vivid growth from the aged, still fruitful bosom of mysterious Nile, along with the ordinary pasture appear the seed leaves of unknown, half-forgotten grasses, reeds, plants, flowers, never noticed except in an abnormally wet season. In cycles of ordinary moisture, the true degree of saturation not having been reached, they lie death-like year after year, until, aroused by Nature's unerring signal, they arise and burst forth into full vitality. In such a time an astonishing variety of herbs, plants, and flowers is to be seen mingling with gigantic grasses, such as Charley Banks described to Mr. Neuchamp when he prophesied, after forty-eight hours of steady rain had fallen, that on the Back Lake Plains this year he would be able to tie the grass tops together before him, *as he sat on horseback*. Mr. Neuchamp had never before discovered his lieutenant in a wilful exaggeration; but on this occasion he felt mortified that he should still be supposed a fit subject upon which to foist humorous fabrications.

'I see you don't believe me,' said Charley, rather put out in turn at not being credited. 'Let's call Jack. You ask him the height of the tallest grass he ever saw

in this part of the country in a real wet season. There he goes. Here, Jack, Mr. Neuchamp wants to ask you a question.'

'I wish to know,' said Ernest gravely, 'to what height you have ever known the grass grow up here in a first-rate season?'

'Well, I don't know about measurement,' said Jack, 'but I remember at Wardree one year we had to muster up all the old screws on the run to give the shepherds to ride.'

'Why was that?'

'Because they couldn't *see* their sheep in the long grass; and out on a plain where the grass was over their own heads, it was hard work not to lose themselves. Of course it was an out-and-out year; something like this is going to be, I expect. Why, I've tied the grass over my horse's shoulder in the spring, as *I've been riding along*, many a time and often.'

Charley Banks smiled.

'That will do, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp.

'I apologise fully,' said Ernest, as soon as they were alone. 'I promise never to lack that confidence in your statements, my dear fellow, which I must say I have hitherto found in every way deserved. How are the cattle doing? You have been out all day, and must have been soaked through and through.'

'I didn't put on anything that water could hurt,' said Charley, 'or very much in the way of quantity either. Jack and I only wanted to be sure of the line the cattle took, so as to get after them to-morrow. We could track them as if they had been walking in batter pudding. If they got off the run now we should have no horses to etch them back with, and if we left them away till they



got strong, they'd be broken in to some other man's run, which would be so much time lost. Luckily they all made for the Back Lake, where there's some sandy ridges and good bedding ground. Freeman's cattle are mixed up with the "circle dots," which is all the better, as they know the run well, and can't be got off it. Lucky they're branded.'

'And how about the old herd?'

'We didn't tire our horses going after them, but, by the main run of the tracks, the nearest of them will stop at the Outer Lake timber; and the head cattle will go slap back to the very outside boundary. We've no neighbours at the back, so the farther back they go the fresher the feed will be. *They're right.*'

'I suppose they will begin to improve in a few months?'

'Improve?' echoed Mr. Banks; 'if this weather is followed up, every beast on Rainbar run, down to a three-months-old calf, will be mud fat *in three months*, and you may begin to take away the first draft of a thousand head of fat cattle that we can send to market—and a rising market, too—before next winter.'

Mr. Neuchamp did not shout aloud, nor cast any part of his clothing into the air, like Jack Windsor: his way of receiving sudden tidings of weal or woe was not demonstrative. But he grasped Charley Banks's hand, and looked into the face of the pleased youngster with a gleam in his eye and a look of triumph such as the latter had rarely witnessed there.

'We have had to wait—"to suffer and be strong,"—Charley, my boy,' he said, 'but I think the battle is won now. You shall have your share of the spoils.'

When Mr. Neuchamp sallied forth on the second day

after the rain, he could not but consider himself in a somewhat similar position to one of the Noachian family taking an excursion after the flood. True, his flood had been of a temporary and wholly beneficial nature, but not the less had it entirely altered the expression upon the face of Nature. Aqueous effects and results were prominently apparent everywhere. Mud and hardened sandy spaces, already flushed with green, had succeeded to the pale, dusty, monotoned landscape.

Thus, once more, short as had been the time of change, the eye was relieved by the delicate but distinct shade of green which commenced to drape the long-sleeping, spell-bound frame of the mighty Mother. Even in the driest seasons, except on river flats, there are minute green spikelets of grass at or just below the surface. Let but one shower of rain fall, softly cherishing, and on the morrow it is marvellous to perceive what an approach to verdure has been made. Then the family of clovers, long dead and buried, but having bequeathed myriads of burr-protected, oleaginous seed vessels to the kind keeping of the baked and powdered soil, reappear in countless hosts of minute leaflets, which grow with incredible rapidity. It is not too much to say that in little more than a week after the 'drought broke up' at Rainbar there was grass several inches high over the entire run. The salt bushes commenced to put forth tender and succulent leaves. All nature drew one great sigh of relief, every living creature—from the small fur-covered rodents and marsupials which pattered along their minute but well-beaten paths when the sun was low to the water, from the wild mare that galloped in snorting through the midnight, with her lean, tireless offspring, to sink her head to the very eyes in the river when she reached it, to the thirsty merino flock at the

well-trough, or the impoverished herd that struggled in hungered and athirst to muddy creek or treacherous river bank—every living creature did sensibly rejoice and give thanks, audibly or otherwise, for this merciful termination to the long agony of the Great Drought.

That morning of the 18th May was a fateful morn to many a struggling beginner like Ernest Neuchamp; to many a grizzled veteran of pioneer campaigns and long wars of exploration, of peril of body and anguish of mind; to many a burdened sire with boys at school to pay for, and the girls' governess to consider, whom the next year's losses, if *the rain held off*, would compel the family to dispense with.

On the night which preceded that day of deliverance Ernest Neuchamp went to bed utterly ruined and hopelessly insolvent; he arose a rich man, able within six months to pay off double the amount of every debt he owed in the world, and possessed beside of a run and stock the market value of which exceeded at least four-fold what he had paid for it.

This was a change, sudden as an earthquake, swift as a revolution, almost awe-striking in its shower of sudden benefits, dazzling in its abrupt change from the dim light of poverty, self-denial, and anxiety, to an unquestioned position of wealth, reputation, and undreamed-of success.

How differently passed the days now! What variety, what hope, what renewed pleasure in the superintendence of details ever leading upward to profit and satisfaction in a hundred different directions!

Day by day the grass grew and bourgeoned and clothed the flats with a meadow-like growth akin to that of his native country. None of this amazing crop, however, was used except by the flocks of travelling sheep

returning strong and well-doing to their long-abandoned homes. These passing hosts made so little impression upon the wonderfully rapid growth that, as Mr. Banks averred, 'you could not see where they had been.' The station cattle, and even the small flock of sheep were 'well out back,' and, presumably, were content to leave the 'frontage' as a reserve for summer needs.

Concurrently with this plenty and profusion, in which every head of the Rainbar stock revelled, from Mr. Levison's 'BI,' whose skin now shone with recovered condition, and who snorted and kicked up his heels as he galloped into the yard with the working horses, to the most dejected weaner of the Freeman 'crawlers,' came strangely exciting news of the wondrous discovery of gold in Victoria, and the rapid rise in the price of meat.

Fat stock were higher and higher in each succeeding market, until the previously unknown and, as the democratic newspapers said, unjustifiable and improper price of ten pounds per head for fat cattle was reached, with a corresponding advance for sheep. As this astounding but by no means dismaying intelligence was conveyed to Mr. Neuchamp in the hastily-torn-open newspaper which he was glancing at outside, just as Jack Windsor had directed his attention to the gambols of 'BI,' who, with arched neck and perfect outline, fully justified Mr. Levison's encomium upon his shape, that gentleman's prophecy as to the enhanced value of Rainbar reaching twenty thousand pounds when 'BI' kicked up his heels seemed likely to be fulfilled to the letter.

Mr. Windsor, in his enthusiasm concerning the condition of the horse left in his charge, and that of the stud generally, had for the moment omitted to open an un-

pretending missive delivered by the same post which lay in his hand. As Ernest turned to walk towards the house he was stopped by the sound of a deep and bitter curse, most infrequent now upon the lips of his much altered follower.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

As Mr. Neuchamp turned, he saw an expression so fell and deadly upon Jack's changed face that he instinctively recalled the day when he first stood before him with levelled weapon and the same stern brow.

'What is the matter, John?' said Ernest kindly. 'Any bad news?'

'Bad enough,' said the man gloomily. 'Never mind me, sir, for a minute or two. I'll come to the house, and tell you all about it directly I've saddled Ben Bolt.'

Then, repressing with an effort all trace of previous emotion, and permitting his features to regain their usual expression, he proceeded to catch and lead to the stable that determined animal, whose spirit had by no means been permanently softened by adversity, as was exhibited by his snorting and trembling as usual when the rein was passed over his neck and the bridle put on. Having done this, Mr. Windsor carefully saddled up, and shortly afterwards appearing in his best suit of clothes, strapped a small roll to the saddle, and rode quietly up to the verandah of the cottage.

'I see that something unusual has happened,' said Mr. Neuchamp, with sympathy in his voice. 'Tell me all about it.'



‘You’ll see it here,’ said his retainer, handing over a short and simple letter from Carrie Walton, in which the impending tragedy of a woman’s life-drama was briefly told. In a few sorrowful words the girl told how that worked upon by the continuous persuasions and reproaches of her parents, she had consented to marry Mr. Homminney on the following Friday week. She had not heard from him, John Windsor, for a long time—perhaps he had forgotten her. In a few days it would be too late, etc. But she was always his sincere friend and well-wisher, Caroline Walton.

‘You see, sir,’ began Mr. Windsor, with something of his old confidence and cool calculation of difficulties in an emergency which required instant bodily exertion, ‘it’s been this way. I’ve been so taken up with these new cattle, and the way everything’s been changed lately, since the weather broke, that I’ve forgot to write to the poor thing. I was expecting to go down with the first lot of fat cattle next month, and I laid it out to square the whole matter, and bring her back with me, if you’ll give us the hut by the river bank to live in. I’ve been a little late—or it looks like it—and they’ve persuaded her into marrying that pumpkin-headed, corn-eating Hawkesbury hog, just because he’s got a good farm and some money in the bank. But if I can get down before the time, if it’s only half an hour, she’ll come to me, and I think I can win the heat if Ben Bolt doesn’t crack up.’

‘What time have you to spare between this and the day of the wedding?’ inquired Ernest.

‘It’s to be on Friday week,’ said Jack.

‘You can never be there in time—it is impossible!’ cried Ernest in a tone of voice which showed his sym-

pathy with his faithful servant. 'I pity you sincerely, John!'

'Pity be hanged, sir. You'll excuse my way of talking. I'm a little off my head, I know; what I mean to say is, I ain't one of those chaps that can grub upon pity, and the likes of it. But I *can* do it, if the old horse holds out, and luckily Joe's been riding him regular since the feed came, and he's fit to race a mile, or travel a hundred, any day.'

'Why, it is a hundred and eighty miles to the mail-coach station, and unless you get there by to-morrow night, you can't get down for another week.'

'I *shall* get there,' replied Jack slowly and with settled determination. 'Ben can do a hundred miles a day, for two days at a pinch, and I have a good bit of the second night thrown in. The mail don't start until midnight. If we're not there, I'll turn shepherd again, and sell Ben to a thrashing machine; we won't have any call to be thought horse or man again. I shall get to Mindai some time to-night—that's eighty miles—and save the old horse all I can; then start about three in the morning, and polish off the hundred miles, if he's the horse I take him to be. He'll have easy times after, if he does it, for I'll never sell him. Good-bye, sir.'

'Good-bye, John; I wish you good fortune, as I really believe my young friend Carry's happiness is at stake. Here are some notes to take with you—money is always handy in elopements, I am informed.'

'You have my real thanks, sir,' said Jack, pocketing the symbols of power; 'I've been a good servant to you, sir, though I say it. I shan't be any the worse if I've a good wife to keep me straight—that is if I get her.'

Here Mr. Windsor gave a short groan, followed by an equally brief imprecation, as he pictured the shining-faced giant, in a wondrous suit of colonial tweed, leading Carry away captive to his Flemish farm, evermore to languish, or grow unromantically plump, in a wilderness of maize-field varied by mountains of pumpkins.

Ernest watched him as he mounted Ben Bolt, whose ears lay back, whose white-cornered eyes stared, whose uneasy tail waved in the old feline fashion, sufficient to scare any stranger about to mount. He saw him take the long trail across the plain at a bounding canter, which was not changed until horse and rider travelled out of the small Rainbar world of vision, and were lost amid the mysteries of the far sky-line. Much he marvelled at this Australian edition of 'Young Lochinvar,' only convinced that if that enterprising gallant had been riding Ben Bolt, when

On to his croupe the fair ladye he swung,

the layers of the odds might have confidently wagered on a very different ending to the ballad. He did not anticipate that the reckless bushman would attempt to 'cut out' his sweetheart from the assembled company of friends and kinsfolk. Yet he could not clearly see how he proposed, so close was the margin left, to possess himself of the fair Carry. But that, if Ben Bolt did not break down, Jack Windsor would, in some shape or form, effect his purpose, and defeat the intended disposal of the Maid of the Inn, he was as certain as if he had witnessed their arrival at Rainbar.

It is not placed beyond the reach of doubt whether or not this matrimonial adventure in any way led Mr. Neuchamp to considerations involving similar possi-

bilities. It may, however, be looked upon as an authenticated legend that although several letters of a congratulatory nature had passed between Paul Frankston and Mr. Neuchamp, 'since the weather broke,' the latter thought it necessary to write once more and acquaint him with the fact that early next month he should commence to send off fat cattle, and that he would come down himself in charge of the first drove.

In the austere boreal regions of the Old World all nature, dormant or pulsating, dumb or informed with speech, waits and hopes, prays and fears, until the unseen relaxation of the grasp of the winter god. Then the ice-fetters break, the river becomes once more a joyous highway, echoing with boat and song, and gay with ensigns. Once more the unlocked earth receives the plough; once more the leaf buds, the flower all blushing steals forth in woodland and meadow; once more the carol of bird, the whistle of the ploughman, the song of sturdy raftsmen, proclaim that the war of Nature with man is ended. So beneath the Southern Cross the unkind strife which Nature ever and anon wages with her children is accented not by wintry blast and iron frost-chain, but by burning heat and the long-protracted water famine. The windows of heaven are locked fast. The thirsty earth looks anguished and sorrow-stricken, daily, hourly, witnessing the torture, the death of her perishing children.

Then, wafted by unseen, unheard messengers, as in the frozen North, the fiat goes forth in the burning South. The soft touch of the Daughter of the Mist is felt upon plant and soil, pool and streamlet. They listen to the sound of softly-falling tear-drops from the sky, and, lo! they arise, rejoicing, to regain life and

vigour, as the sick from the physician, as the babe from the mother's tendance.

Once more was there joy in the broad Australian steppes and pastures, from the apple orchards of the south to the boundless ocean-plains of the far north-west, where the saltbush grows, and the myall and the mulgah, where the willowy coubah weeps over the dying streamlet, where the wild horse snorts at dawn on the lonely sandhill, where the emu stalks stately through the golden clear moonlight.

Now had arisen in good sooth for Ernest Neuchamp a day of prosperity and triumph. By every post came news of that uprising of prices which Mr. Levison had foretold, in stock and stations, in horses and in cattle, in land and in houses, in corn and in labour. This last consideration, though serious enough to the owners of sheep, in the comparatively unenlightened days which preceded the grand economy of fencing runs, was not of much weight with Ernest. His adherents were tried and trusty, and neither Charley Banks nor Jack Windsor would have abandoned him for all the gold in Ballarat and all the silver in Nevada. Piambook and Boinmaroo, incurious and taking no thought for the morrow, with the characteristic childishness of their race, dreamed of no adequate motive which should sever them from the light work and regularly-dispensed tobacco of Misser Noochum. With his own assistance they were amply sufficient for all the work of the establishment, now that the 'circle dot' cattle, thoroughly broken to the run, had taken up regular beats, and divided themselves by consent into mobs or subdivisions, each with its own leader.

Many a pleasant ride had Ernest now that all things

'had suffered,' not 'a sea-change,' but none the less an astounding metamorphosis, into 'something rich and strange.'

Daily he made long-disused excursions into the mysterious, half-unknown land of 'the Back,' only to find, after each fresh day's exploring, richer pasture, fuller watercourses, stronger, more frolicsome cattle. These last had grown and thriven on the over-abundant pasture, 'out of knowledge,' as Charley Banks averred. Again were the old triumphs and glories of a cattle-station re-enacted. Again he saw the heavy rolling droves of bullocks come panting and teeming into camp. Again he witnessed the reckless speed and practised wheel of the trained stock horses. All things, indeed, were changed.

Charley Banks was never tired of sounding the praises of the glorious season, and of the splendid fattening qualities of Rainbar, with its extraordinary variety of plant-wealth, herbs, grasses, saltbushes, clovers, every green thing, from wild carrots to crowsfoot, which the heart of man, devoted to the welfare of his herd, could desire.

'I never saw anything like those "circle dot" cattle for laying it on,' he would say. 'They're as big again as they were. And those crawlers of Freemans'—they'll pay out and out. We've branded as many calves from 'em as will come to half the purchase money, at present prices. It will soon be time to move the fat cattle; in another month or two Rainbar will be full of 'em.'

The only persons to whom the rain had not brought joy and gladness were Freeman Brothers. These worthy yeomen began to consider that after all this hard work, as they expressed it, they had been shamefully outwitted and deceived. The travel-worn cattle-dealer, who had



driven so hard a bargain with them, had turned out to be the great Abstinens Levison, no less. Their stock had been handed over to Mr. Neuchamp, with whom, doubtless, he had been in league. Now they were growing and fattening fast, prices rising faster, and not a shilling for *them*, out of it all. Then they had to wait idle on their land till November, or less lose the cash agreed on.

‘Then to hand everything over—most likely for the benefit of a young fellow who knew nothing about the country—a —— blessed “new chum”—hang him. The country was getting too full of the likes of him. It was enough to make a man turn digger.’

Abraham Freeman and his wife were the only contented individuals of the once peaceful co-operative community. They would have secured sufficient capital upon the payment of the coming instalments to purchase a well-improved farm in their old neighbourhood, to which they proposed immediately to return, and there spend the remainder of an unambitious existence.

‘They had seen quite enough of this far-out life,’ they said. ‘Free-selecting here might be very well for some people: it didn’t suit them. They liked a quiet place in a cool climate, where the crops grew, and the cows gave them milk all the year round—not a feast or a famine. If they had the chance, please God, they would know *next time* when they were well off.’

One afternoon Charley Banks came tearing in, displaying in triumph a provincial journal, the *Parramatta Postboy*, directed to him in unknown handwriting. Pointing to a column, headed ‘Elopement extraordinary,’ he commenced with great difficulty, owing to the frequency of his ejaculations and bursts of laughter, to read aloud

to Mr. Neuchamp the following extract, from which it may be gathered that Mr. Windsor 'was on time,' in spite of all apparent obstacles :

It is seldom that we have to chronicle so dramatic an incident as that which has just occurred in our midst, and which was fraught with deep interest to one of our most respected residents of old standing in the neighbourhood. We refer to the sudden and wholly unexpected matrimonial arrangement made by Miss C—y W—n, the daughter of mine host of the old-established well-known family hotel, the 'Cheshire Cheese.' It would appear that Mr. Henry Homminey, the successful Hawkesbury agriculturist, was about to lead the blushing fair one, with the full consent of the family, to the hymeneal altar, on Friday last. 'All went merry as a marriage bell,' till on Thursday evening Mr. John Windsor, cattle manager at Rainbar for Ernest Neuchamp, Esq., appeared at the 'Cheshire Cheese,' and joined the family party. He had been formerly acquainted with the bride-elect, but stated that he had merely come to offer his congratulations, and pass a pleasant hour. He was warmly welcomed, and the evening passed off successfully. At the appointed hour next morning the happy bridegroom appeared with his friends, who had mustered strongly for the occasion, but, to their dismay and disappointment, they were informed by Mr. W—n that the bride's chamber was empty, and that she had not attended the family matutinal repast. Mr. Homminey's feelings may be imagined but cannot be described. He at once started in pursuit of the fugitives, but after riding a few miles at a furious pace, his horse showed signs of distress, and he was persuaded by his personal friends to wend his steps in the direction of Richmond. Much sympathy is felt for his loss and disappointment. But, since the days of earliest classic records, the man of solid worth has occasionally been eclipsed, in the eyes of the fair, by the possessor of the more ornamental qualities with which Mr. Windsor is credited.

'Well done, Jack !' shouted Mr. Banks, as he finished the concluding editorial reflection ; 'and well done, Ben Bolt ! He must have polished off that hundred and eighty miles, or else Jack would never have been up to time. It's a good deal to depend on a horse's legs.

Well, Carry Walton's a stunning girl, and it will be the making of Jack. He'll go as straight as a die now.'

'I must say I feel much gratified also,' assented Ernest. 'I should have been afraid of some of the old reckless spirit prevailing over him, if he had lost our friend Carry. Now I feel assured of his future prosperity. He is a fine, manly, intelligent fellow, and wants nothing but a sufficient object in life to make him put out his best energies.'

'Jack's as smart an all-round man as ever stepped,' said Mr. Banks, 'and with a real good headpiece too, though there's not much book-learning in it. He'd fight for you to the last drop of his blood, too. I know that.'

'It is well to have a faithful retainer at times,' said Mr. Neuchamp thoughtfully. 'It carries a mutual benefit, often lost sight of in these days of selfish realism.'

'How shall we manage with the cattle without him?' queried Mr. Banks.

'I must take the two black boys,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'and you must do the best you can on the run by yourself; for business renders it absolutely necessary that I should visit Sydney.'

'I daresay I'll manage, somehow,' said Mr. Banks. 'I must get Tottie Freeman to help me, if I'm hard pushed. She's the smartest hand with cattle of the lot.'

'I do not think that arrangement would quite answer,' quoth Mr. Neuchamp gravely.

Within a fortnight after this conversation Mr. Neuchamp and his sable retainers might have been observed making the usual stages with a most satisfactory drove of fat cattle in front of them. They were not, perhaps, equal to the first lot he recollected despatching

from Rainbar; but 'cattle were cattle' now, in the language of the butchers. There were plenty more coming on, and it was not thought advisable to wait longer for the ultimate 'topping up' of the beeves. They were good enough. The demand was prodigious; and purchasers did not make half the critical objections that were used in the old days, when cattle were not half the price.

In the appointed time the important draft reached Sydney, and before Mr. Neuchamp could look round, it seemed to him, they were snapped up at eight-pounds-ten a head, no allusions made to 'rough cattle,' or 'very plain on the back,' 'old cows,' 'light weights,' or any of the usual strong depreciations customary on former occasions. No; a new era seemed to have set in. All was right as long as the count was accurate. So satisfactory was the settling that Mr. Neuchamp at once wrote to Charley Banks to muster and send down another draft, even if he *had* to put Tottie Freeman in charge of Rainbar while he was on the road.

Then came the immediate rush to the office of Frankston and Co., and a meeting with old Paul, that made up for much of enforced privation and protracted self-denial.

'My dear boy! most glad to see you, at last; thought that we should never see your face again. Knew you couldn't come before the rain did. Can't leave the ship until tide serves and the wind's fair. But *now* the voyage is over, first mate's in charge of the ship, and the skipper can put on his long-shore toggery and cruise for a spell. Of course you're on your way out to dine with us?'

Ernest mentioned that, presuming upon old acquaintance, such had been his intention.

‘Antonia will be ever so glad to see you; but she must tell you all the news herself. You will find your cousin at Morahmee. She and Antonia are wonderful friends—that is——’

‘That is,’ said Ernest, completing Paul’s sentence, over which the worthy merchant appeared to hesitate somewhat—‘that is, as close as two people very widely dissimilar in taste and temperament can ever be.’

‘Perhaps there *may* be a slightly different way of looking at things, and so on,’ said his old friend cautiously; ‘but all crafts are not built out of the same sort of timber, or on the same lines. Some are oak, some of American pine, some of teak, some of white gum; some with a smart shear, some with a good allowance of beam; and they can’t be altered over much. As the keel’s laid down, so the boat’s bound to float.’

‘H—m!’ replied Ernest thoughtfully, ‘that involves a large question—several large questions, in fact. Good-bye for the present.’

How many memories crowded upon the brain of Ernest Neuchamp as he once more trod the massive sandstone flags underneath the portico of the verandah at Morahmee! The freshly raked gravel walks, the boscage of glowing green which formed the living walls of the renovated shrubberies, the well-remembered murmur of the low-toned restless surge, the odour of the unchanged deep, all these sharply contrasted sights and sounds after his weary sojourn in the desert composed for him a page of Boccaccio, framed a panel of Watteau-painting. He was a knight in an enchanted Armida garden. And as Antonia, freshly attired in evening dress, radiant with unmistakable welcome, appeared to greet him on the threshold of the open door, he felt as if the knight who

had done his devoir was about to receive the traditional guerdon, so necessary to the perfect equilibrium of the world of chivalry and romance.

‘Welcome from Palestine!’ she said, unconsciously following out his train of thought, as she ran forward and clasped him by the hand. ‘I don’t know whether one can call any part of the bush the Holy Land; but you have been away quite long enough to have gone there. Had you vowed a vow never to come back till rain fell? People may stay away too long sometimes.’ Here she gazed at Ernest with a long, searching, humbled gaze, which suddenly brightened as when the summer cloud catches the partially obscured sun-ray. ‘But here is Augusta, coming to ask you if Rainbar won’t be swallowed up in a second deluge now that the drought has broken up, as she is credibly informed is always the case in Australia!’ A mischievous twinkle in her mirthful eye informed Ernest that his cousin’s peculiarities had been accurately measured by the prepossessing reviewer before him.

As Miss Neuchamp, also attired in full evening costume, approached, while not far behind, with the air of a confirmed *habitué*, sauntered Mr. Jermyn Croker, Ernest thought he had never seen that young lady look to greater advantage. Something had evidently occurred with power to revive an attention to the details of dress which had been suffered of late to lie in abeyance. There was also a novel expression of not unbecoming doubt upon her resolute features which Ernest had never observed before. It soon appeared, however, that her essential characteristics were unchanged.

‘I am truly glad to see you, my dear Ernest,’ she said, offering him her cheek with proper cousinly coolness. ‘I



hear that a beneficial change has taken place in your shocking climate. Mr. Croker says that prices have risen to their outside limit, and cannot possibly last. Of course you will sell out at once and go home ?’

‘Of course I shall do no such thing,’ returned Ernest, with such unusual animation that Antonia could not help smiling. ‘I should consider it most ungrateful, as well as impolitic, to quit the land which has already done much for me, and may possibly do more.’

‘Well done, Ernest, my boy !’ said Mr. Frankston, who had just joined the party. ‘Never quit the ship that has weathered the storm with you while a plank is left in her. Now that we have our country filled with the sweepings of every port under the sun, we want the captain and first officer to act like men, and show the stuff they’re made of.’

‘I take quite a different view of my duty to Jermyn Croker, about whom I have felt much anxiety of late,’ drawled out that gentleman. ‘I see before me a chance of selling out at an absurdly high price, and taking my passage by next mail for one of the few countries that is worth living in. A madman might neglect such an opportunity for the sake of a few thousand roughs scrambling for gold at California, or Ballarat, but not Jermyn Croker, if I know him.’

‘And suppose stock rise higher still ?’ queried Mr. Frankston, smiling at the magnificent dogmatism of his unsentimental friend.

‘My dear Frankston, how a man of your age and experience can so blind himself to the real state of affairs is a marvel to me. Cattle *can’t* rise. Five pounds all round for young and old on the station is a price never before reached in Australia. You *must* see the crash

that is coming. Really, now, without humbug, don't you know that there will be a change before Christmas?'

'So there will,' answered Paul, 'but it will be for the better. We have not half the stock in the country to feed the great multitude that are, even now, on the sea. But if you *will* sell, you might give me the offer.'

'Sold out of every hoof to Parklands this morning!' answered Mr. Croker, looking round with a triumphant air. 'I was standing on the club steps before breakfast when he came in from the northern steamer, and made me an offer before he got out of his hansom.'

'And you took it?'

'Took it? of course. We went into the library, where he wrote me out a cheque then and there for twenty thousand pounds, and I gave him the delivery note. Booroo-booroo and Chatsworth, with four thousand head of cattle, taken, without muster, by the book, everything given in. Something like a sale, wasn't it?'

'First-rate for some one—I don't say who. But I'll take three to one that Parklands knocks five thousand pounds profit out of it before the year is over.'

'I take you, provided he doesn't sell to Neuchamp,' answered Croker. 'I must say I think one bargain with him ought to satisfy any man, except Selmore.'

'I'll bet you a level hundred,' said Paul, a little quickly, 'that in five years Ernest here will be able to buy you up—horse, foot, and dragoons—without feeling the amount.'

'Particularly if he has the invaluable aid and counsel of Paul Frankston,' sneered Mr. Jermyn Croker. 'However, I shan't be here to see, as I never intend to cross the Nepean again, or to see Sydney Heads except in an engraving.'

‘We’ll all go and see you off,’ said Antonia, who with Ernest suddenly appeared as if they had not been listening to the conversation, which indeed they had not, but had taken a quiet walk down ‘an alley Titanic’ with glorious araucarias. ‘But whoever goes or stays, we must have dinner. I really *do* believe that it’s past seven o’clock.’

At this terrible announcement Paul’s ever robust punctuality asserted itself with a rebound. Seizing upon the fair Augusta he hurried her to the dining-room, where all conversation bordering upon business was banished for the present.

After the ladies had retired, the fascinating topic of the changed social aspect of the country since the gold crop had alternated with those of wheat, maize, wool, and tallow, which formerly absorbed so large a share of interest, again came uppermost. Upon this point Mr. Croker was grandly didactic.

‘Mark my words, Frankston,’ said he, throwing himself back in his chair, ‘in two years you will see this country a perfect hell upon earth! What’s to hinder it? Even now there’s hardly a shepherd to be got; people are talking of turning their sheep loose—that, of course, means ruin to wool-growing. Cattle will soon overtake the temporary demand; all the new buyers—nothing personal intended, Neuchamp—will be ruined. Tallow will fall directly the Russians have settled their difficulty. I know this from private sources. Flour will be a hundred pounds a ton again; of course there will be no ploughing for want of hands. These digger fellows will take to cutting their own throats first, and when in good practice those of the propertied classes for a change; and lastly, you’ll have universal suffrage. The scum will be

uppermost, and you'll end suitably with an unparalleled *Jacquerie*.'

Mr. Croker, having completed this pleasing patriotic sketch, filled his glass and looked round with the air of a man who had just demonstrated to inquiring youth that two and two make four.

'Australia was always a beastly hole,' he continued; but really, I think, when—even before—it comes to what I have outlined, it will cease to be fit for a gentleman to live in.'

'You must pardon me for expressing a directly contrary opinion,' replied Ernest, who had been gradually girding himself up to answer Mr. Croker according to his humour. 'I hold that this is precisely the time, and these are the exact circumstances, which render it a point of honour for every gentleman who has past or present interest in the land to live in it, to stand by his colours and lead his regiment in the battle which is so imminent. Now is the time for those who have felt or asserted an interest in this glorious last-discovered Eldorado, far down in the list of English provinces which have a way of changing into nations, to uphold with all the manhood that is in them her righteous laws, her goodly customs, her pure yet untrammelled liberty. In my mind, he who takes advantage of the rise in prices to quit Australia for ever at this hour of her social need, deserts his duty, abandons his post, and confesses himself to be less a true colonist than a sordid huckster!'

As Mr. Neuchamp delivered himself of this perhaps slightly coloured estimate of the duty of a pastoral tenant, unheeding of the implied rebuke to the last speaker, he raised his head and confronted the company

with the air of the captain of a sinking ship who has vowed to stand by her while a plank floats.

Jermyn Croker coloured, but did not immediately reply, while the host took occasion to interfere, as became his position of mediator between over-hasty disputants.

‘I think you are both a little beyond the mark,’ he said: ‘if you will allow me, who have lived here since Sydney was a small seaside village, to give you my ideas. No doubt, as Croker says, we shall have a queer crew, with every kind of lubber and every known sort of blackguard to deal with. But what of that? Discipline has always been kept up in old New South Wales,—in times, too, when matters looked black enough. The same men, or their sons, are here now who showed themselves equal to the occasion before. We have Old England at our backs; and though she doesn’t bother us with much advice or short leading strings, she has a ship or two and a regiment left which are at the service of any of her colonies when need is.’

‘Every country where gold has been discovered up to this time has gradually degenerated and come to grief,’ asserted Croker, recovering from his dissatisfied silence; ‘not that much degeneration is possible here.’

‘You are thinking of the Spaniards, the Mexicans, and so on,’ said Paul. ‘I’ve been among them, and know all about their ways. They are not so much worse than other people. But even so: English people have always managed to govern themselves under all circumstances, and will again, I venture to bet.’

‘I came out here thinking Australia a good place to make money. I always knew England was a good place to spend it in,’ averred Mr. Croker. ‘I’m a man of few

ideas, I confess. But I have stuck to these few, and I think I see my way.'

'I suppose we all do,' said Mr. Frankston; 'but some have more luck or better eyesight than others. Our friend Levison wouldn't make a bad man at the "look-out" in dirty weather, eh, Ernest? What do you think of him, Croker?'

'Think? why, that he's an immensely overrated man; he has made a few hits by straightforward blundering and kept what he has got. I give him credit for that. But who's to know whether all this station property that stands in his name is *really* his? The banks may have the lion's share for all anybody knows.'

'Highly probable,' assented Ernest, with fierce sarcasm; 'and Levison's steady prophecy that the season was going to break just before it did was an accidental guess! His purchasing stock, stations, and town property for the rise, which no one else believed in, was a chance hit! His uniformly good sales when every one else was holding! His large purchases when all the world was selling! His unostentatious gifts, at the rate of two to a thousand pounds, to church buildings were unredeemed parsimony! His advice to me to buy and his actual purchases of stock for my benefit, every pound invested in which has furnished a profit of ten, were selfish mistakes! You must excuse me, Croker, for saying that I think you have reared a larger crop of prejudices in Australia than any man I have seen here.'

'It's a fine climate!' quoth Paul; 'everything grows and develops; even experience, like Madeira in the voyage round the Cape, ripens twice as fast here as anywhere else. A whitewasher, Croker? I really



believe this is a bottle of the Manzanares you prefer, and we'll join the ladies, which means adjourn to the verandah.'

If happiness, at any period or season, did dwell upon the earth, she must have sojourned, about the month of September 185—, so near to the New Holland Club, so near to the person of Ernest Neuchamp, as to have been occasionally visible to the naked eye. Had a company of *savans* been told off to view the goddess, as in the far less important matter of the transit of Venus, success had been certain. But society never recognises its real wonders—its absolute and imperious miracles. Therefore for a little space that earthly maid glorified the dwelling and precincts of the untrammelled, rejoicing, successful proprietor. She sat by Mr. Neuchamp at the daintily prepared refectious of the club, and gave an added flavour to his moderate but intense enjoyment of viand and vintage, so wondrous in variety, so miraculous of aroma, after his long endurance of the unpalatable monotony of the Rainbar cuisine. She whispered in the mystic tones of the many-voiced sea-breezes, as they murmured around his steps when, with Antonia at his side, he roamed through the mimic woods of Morahmee, or gazed with never-ending contemplative joy on the pale moon's silver tracery o'er wave and strand. She rose with him in the joyous morn, telling him the ever-welcome tale that all cause for anxiety had fled, that a new ukase had gone forth, bringing unmingled joy to every man of his order, always excepting the sheepholders and Jermyn Croker. She sat behind him, on Osmund, displacing 'the sad companion ghastly pale' even 'atra Cura,' who had been the occupant of a croup seat on

that gallant steed for many a day. Once more the rattle of flying hoofs was heard upon the sandy downs and red hill-roads which, near Bondi's ceaseless surge, overlook the city's mingled mass, the ocean's fresh eternal glory. In this season of joy and pride—the natural and becoming pride of him who has suffered and struggled, waited and warred for no mean reward, which at length he has been permitted to grasp—the bright goddess smiled on every act, thought, and hope of Ernest Neuchamp. In that fair brief bygone day of unalloyed triumph, of unclouded hope, it is a truth most absolute and indisputable that she stood by his side in serene and awful beauty; but, like her austere sister of old who cried aloud in the streets to a heedless generation, 'no man regarded her.'

Through all this halcyon time no definite pledge or vow had passed between him and the woman whom he had slowly, but with all the force of an inflexibly tenacious nature, come to consider as the embodied essence of that mysterious complement to man's nature, at once the vital necessity, the crowning glory, of this mortal state, the vision of female perfection! Proud, fastidious, a searcher after ideals, prone to postpone the irrevocable decision by which man's fate here below is for ever sealed, he was now face to face with Destiny. Even now he felt so utterly fascinated, so supremely content, with the graduated intimacies of which the daily process which draws two human hearts together into indescribable union is composed, so charmed with the undreamed-of treasures of mind and heart which each fresh casket unlocked displayed to his gaze, that he felt no desire to change the mode of bliss. Why hurry to an end this sojourn in the land of Faerye, while the bridle-reins of

the Queen of Elf-land and her troop were ringing still through the haunted woods, while feast and tournament still went merrily on, while stream and emerald turf and bosky glade were still touched with the glory of successful love, while the glamour still held sea and sky and far-enpurpled mounts, upon which, let but once the knell of disenchantment sound, no mortal may again gaze *while life endures?*

During all this time of joy and consolation Mr. Neuchamp had regular advices from his lieutenant, Charley Banks. That young gentleman complained piteously of his lonely state and solitary lodging in the wilderness, for which nothing compensated, it would appear, but the increasing beauty of the season (pastorally considered) and an occasional gossip with Tottie Freeman.

Now that the rain had found out the way to salt-bush land, there seemed to be but little variety of weather. It rained every other day, sometimes for nearly a week, incredible to relate, without stopping. The creeks were full, the flats were soaked, spongy, and knee-deep in clover. The river was high, had come down 'a banker,' and any further rainfall at the head waters, or even the melting of the snow, might bring down a flood such as the dwellers in those parts had not seen for many a day. The Freemans were uncomfortable enough. They had found that their huts and fencing had been placed on land too low for comfort in a wet season, and even for safety if the threatened floods rose higher than usual.

In November, the third spring month of the Australians, another despatch of greater weight and importance reached Mr. Neuchamp, who apparently was not hasting to quit the land of French cooks and Italian singers, of

pleasant day saunterings, of cheerful lunch parties, and moonlight rambles by the murmuring sea. Mr. Banks had the distinguished honour of entertaining Mr. Levison, but lately returned from Melbourne, and engaged in starting two or three thousand head of fat cattle for that market. He had come round by Rainbar, he said, on purpose to take delivery of the Freemans' land, but he, Charley Banks, thought it more likely that he wanted to see old 'BI' (who looked splendid, with a crest like a lion), and whom he rode away in triumph. He handed over the deeds of all the Freemans' conditional purchases to him to give to Mr. Neuchamp, saying that he hoped he wouldn't do that sort of thing again, as he might not come out of it right another time.

Mr. Banks further related that he had volunteered as his deliberate opinion, from what he had noticed about the Victorian gold mines, that the yield of gold would last many years, during which time stock would continue to be high in price, although there might be temporary depressions. As a consequence of which state of things, the sooner every one bought all the store stock they could lay hands on the better. "My word," he said, "it was a lucky drop-in—not for them though—that I picked you up those Freeman cattle, not to speak of the 'circle dots.' There will be no more eight-and-sixpenny store cattle, or fifteen-bob ones either—two pounds for cows, and fifty shillings and three pounds for good steers and bullocks will be more like it, and they will pay at that price too. But what I want you to tell Mr. Neuchamp is this. I'd write to him, but I'm in a hurry off, and you can do it quite as well, if you're careful and attend to what I tell you.

"I've just had information that the Sydney people

who have got the agency of the Mildool run, that joins you, are going to sell. They've got it into their wise heads that cattle have seen their top, because they're worth five pounds all round, that is, with stations; and because they're old-fashioned Sydney-siders that never heard of such a price since the days when they used to bring buffaloes from India.

“They believe that Victoria is choke-full of Yankees and diggers, stowaways and emigrants, and that the whole thing will ‘bust up’ directly, and let down prices everywhere to what they were before the gold.

“People that travel, and keep their eyes open, know what foolishness all this sort of thing is. A regular Sydney man thinks all Victorians are blowers and speculators. A regular Victorian thinks all Sydney men are old-fashioned, slow prigs who wouldn't spend a guinea to save five pounds. The truth is pretty near the middle. Don't you stick at home all your life, like a mallee scrubber, that has only one dart, on the plain and back to his scrub, and then you won't run away with the notion that because a man is born on one side of a river and not on the other, he ain't as clever, or as sensible, or as good a hand at making money or saving it, as you are. It's only country-bred, country-reared folks that think that way.

“What I want you to tell the boss is this. He'd better set old Paul Frankston to get a quiet offer of this Mildool with four thousand odd head—it will carry about seven or eight—and if they'll take four-fifteen or five pound all round, ram 'em with it at once. Tell Neuchamp he can send that native chap to manage it, and it will be the best day's work he's done for some time. Tell him Ab. Levison said so. Good-bye. You

take a run down to Melbourne next chance you get of a holiday, and don't stay out here till you get the Darling rot. Good-bye."

'And so he cantered off on old "BI." Levison don't go in for much talk in a general way, but when he once begins he don't leave off so easy. I thought he was going to talk all night, and so lose a day. But catch him at that. I think I've told you every word he said, for I went and wrote it down as soon as he went away.'

So far Mr. Banks. Upon the receipt of his artless missive, Ernest went at once to Paul Frankston, and communicated to him the substance of the message of Mr. Levison.

'This is putting on the pot, my dear boy,' said he. 'If anything happens to shake stock, Rainbar and Mildool will tumble down like a house of cards. But now the wind is dead fair, and we may venture on studding-sails—crowd on below and aloft. I back Levison's opinion that it is the right time to buy before Sticker and Pugsley's notion that it is the right time to sell.'

'What sort of terms do you think they will require?' asked Ernest, who was fired with the idea of consolidating into one magnificent property the two crack cattle runs of Rainbar and Mildool, the latter a grandly watered, splendidly grassed station, but wofully mismanaged according to old custom.

'Half cash at least, and not very long dated bills either,' said Paul, 'but we can manage the cash on your security, as your name now stands high in the money market. As to the bills, tell them that I will endorse them. They won't make any objection then.'

'How much heavier is the load of my obligations to you to become?' asked Ernest. 'I feel as if I should



never live to free myself from the debt I owe you already.'

'Don't trouble yourself, my dear boy,' said the liberal endorser. 'If things go well, nothing's easier for you than to clear off every stiver of debt. See how you have been able to pay off Levison, principal and interest, out of that last lot of cattle, without a shade of difficulty. If the rise takes place which Levison and I and some more of us anticipate, why you, I, and he stand to win something very respectable. You can then give us all a cheque for the amount advanced, and the whole thing is over and finished. Until the drought broke up, I don't deny that we all had to be very close-hauled, and lay-to a good deal from time to time; but now, with bullocks eight pounds a head, and fat sheep ten shillings—wool up too, and real property rising,—not to mention the shipping trade doubling every month,—why, if we can't clap on sail, my boy, we never can, and what the ship can't carry she may drag.'

The old man looked so thoroughly convinced of the truth of his convictions as he spoke, with the kindling eye and elevated visage of one resolved upon a hazardous but honourable enterprise, that Ernest Neuchamp, always prone to be influenced by contagious exaltation of sentiment, caught fire from his ardent mien and tone.

'Well, so be it,' he said; 'I am content to sink or swim in the same boat with you and yours. We have Ab. Levison for a pilot, and he knows all the rocks and soundings of the pastoral deep sea from Penrith to Carpentaria, I should say. As you say there's a time for all things, I think this is the time to back one's opinion in reason and moderation. I will go and confront the agents for Mildool.'

Messrs. Sticker and Pugsley were steady-going, precise men of business of the old school. As stock and station agents they had always steadily set their faces against all outlay except for the merest necessities of life. Bred to their business in the old times when stock were plentiful, labour cheap, and cash extremely hard to lay hold of in any shape or form, they struggled desperately against these new-fangled notions of 'throwing away money uselessly,' as they termed the comparatively large outlay which they occasionally heard of upon dams, wells, fencing, woolsheds, and washpens. Large profits had been made in the good old times, when such speculations would have gone nigh to have furnished a warrant *de lunatico inquirendo*. They did not see how it was all to be repaid. They doubted the management which comprehended such sinful extravagance; and they proposed to continue their time-honoured system, which made it imperative upon all stockholders who were unlucky enough to be in debt to them, to spend nothing, to live upon shepherds' wages, and not to think of coming to town until times improved.

One wonders if it ever occurred to these snug-comfort loving cits, as daily they drove home to pleasant villas and luxurious surroundings—did it ever occur to them, after the second glass of old port, to what a life of wretchedness, solitude, and sordid surroundings their griping parsimony was condemning the unlucky exile from civilisation, who was hopelessly chained to their ledger? For him no beeswing port, no claret of Bordeaux. He drank his 'Jack the Painter' tea milkless, most probably, and flavoured with blackest sugar, occasionally stimulating his ideality with ration rum or villainous dark brandy. Though his the brain that

planned, the hand that carried out long desert wayfarings of exploration—long, toilsome drudgeries of stock travelling to lone untrodden wilds; his the frame that withered, the eye that dimmed, the health that failed, the blood that flowed, ere the process of colonising, progression, and commercial extension was complete. Thus land was occupied, villages sprang up, inter-communication was established, and the wilderness subdued. All the magnificent results of civilisation were brought about over territories of incredible area by the intelligence, enterprise, and energy of one individual. And he, too often, when the battle was won, the standard hoisted, and the multitude pouring over the breach, found himself a beggared and a broken man.

Mr. Neuchamp, after due preliminaries, entered the office of Messrs. Sticker and Pugsley, with whom he had an interview by no means of a disagreeable character. The senior partner, an elderly, gray-haired personage, showed much of the formal politeness which is commonly thought to distinguish the gentleman of 'the old school.' He received Ernest courteously, begged that he would take a chair, alluded to the weather, deplored the arrival of the mosquitoes, to which the rain and the spring in conjunction had been jointly favourable, requested to know whom he had the honour of receiving, and finally desired information as to the particular mode in which he could be of service to him.

'I have been informed,' said Ernest, 'that your firm are agents for the Mildool station, and that it is in the market. I have come to request that you will put it under offer to me, as I have some intention of purchasing a property of that sort.'

'We have not as yet advertised it,' replied Mr.

Sticker; 'still, you have been rightly informed that the station and stock are for sale. But we do not think of offering it upon the usual terms; our own opinion is, I do not disguise it from you, that present prices will not last. I have been many years in the colony, and such is my belief. Mr. Pugsley, whose opinion of the permanence of present high rates is better than mine, also believes that, with the properties entrusted to us, it is as well to be safe, and to take advantage of an opportunity that may never occur again. Our terms for Mildool are briefly these: We offer four thousand head of mixed cattle, above six months old, with, of course, the MQ brand, at five pounds per head, everything given in. I am informed that the improvements are scanty and in bad repair; there are twenty stock horses, and a team of bullocks and dray, two huts, and a stockyard. But, perhaps, you know the property, and the appearance of the buildings.'

'The huts *are* old and bad,' said Ernest, smiling; 'and as for the stockyard, the Mildool stockmen have for the last few years brought their cattle to our yard for safety, as you could kick down the Mildool yard anywhere. But what is your idea of terms?'

'Half cash, and the balance in approved bills, at one and two years, secured upon the stock and station.'

'Rather stiff,' said Ernest; 'but will you put the offer in writing, and leave it open for a week? I will before that time give you a decided answer.'

Mr. Sticker would have much pleasure in doing so. As Ernest preferred to wait for the important document, it was soon prepared, and he finally marched away with a fortune, as it turned out (fate and opportunity are queer things), in his waistcoat pocket. He was not too quick

in his conditional annexation of this desirable territory. Ten minutes afterwards Mr. Hardy Baldacre dashed into the office on the same errand, quitting it with a curse which shocked Mr. Sticker, and provoked Mr. Pugsley, who was young and athletic, to inform him that he must not suppose that his money provided him the permission to be rude, though it did procure him consideration far beyond his deserts. Altogether, Mr. Baldacre felt as if his brandy-and-soda had been scarcely so efficacious as usual that morning.

When Mr. Neuchamp produced this small but important document to Paul Frankston, that commercial mentor rubbed his hands with unconcealed satisfaction.

‘You’ve got ’em, Ernest, my boy, hard and fast. I believe you might make a pound a head, say four thousand pounds out of it, in a month. Sticker is a good man, according to his light, and Pug’s a sharp fellow. But they don’t see, and won’t see, the signs of the times. They’re always remembering the old boiling-down days, and they fancy that the least change in markets will send us back to it. You did right to get the offer in writing, and for a deferred time. We’ll keep it a day or two, and then you shall go and accept the terms like a man.’

‘But how about the money?’ inquired Mr. Neuchamp with a shade of natural anxiety. ‘Twenty thousand pounds are no nutshells, however little it may sound in these extravagant days.’

‘Look here,’ said Paul, ‘find this ten thousand down; any agent will give you five thousand on the security of your year’s draft of fat stock from the two runs; it will come to more, I daresay, but we must be as careful as we can. I think that you will have to give a mortgage

over Rainbar and Mildool—a second one—and then you may draw a cheque for the ten thousand as soon as you like.’

‘And what about the “approved” bills?’

‘Well, the day after to-morrow you can go to old Sticker and pay him the half cash. I’ll put the cash part of it through; ask him to make out the bills, with interest added at 8 per cent; bring them to me, and I will put a name on the back which will render them legal tender, whatever may come of them after.’

‘The old story since I came to Australia,’ said Ernest. ‘It seems that I can do nothing without your advice; and that your help follows me as a natural consequence—whatever I do, and whatever I buy.’

‘Well, if this shot turns out badly,’ said Paul, ‘I’ll promise not to *back your bills any more*. Will that satisfy you? But Levison seems quite determined, “just this once,” as the children say, and I generally take his tip if I see a chance. I think our money is on the right horse.’

‘I hope so,’ said Ernest, thinking, respectfully, of the lovely condition of Rainbar at the moment, and fearing lest, by any financial legerdemain, it might be taken away from him in time to come.

Before the week was ended, during which the offer of Mildool was open for his acceptance, Mr. Neuchamp had the satisfaction of handing Mr. Sticker a cheque for ten thousand pounds, which he had been obligingly permitted by his banker to draw against certain securities, and also two bills, with interest added at the rate of 8 per cent, for the balance. Upon which somewhat important documents being well scanned and examined, and further submitted to Mr. Pugsley, who was on that occasion intro-



duced, Ernest received an order to obtain delivery of the Mildool station, having twenty-four miles frontage to the river, and going thirty miles back, with four thousand head of cattle, more or less, depasturing thereon, the same to be mustered and counted over in six weeks; any cattle deficient to be paid for by Sticker and Pugsley, at the rate of two-pounds-ten per head, and all cattle in excess to be taken by the purchaser at that price. When this transaction was concluded—on paper, Mr. Neuchamp began to realise that he was having pastoral greatness thrust upon him.

Speculation is a grandly exciting occupation, when all goes well. When the bark is launched, mayhap with tremulous hope, perchance with the reckless pride of youth, there is a wondrously intoxicating triumph in noting the gradual, ever-deep, engine-flowing tide, the steady, favourable gale before which the galley which carried Cæsar and his fortunes ‘walks the waters like a thing of life,’ and finally conveys the illustrious freight to one of the fair havens of the gracious goddess Success. A triumph is decreed to Cæsar. Immediately Cæsar’s critics become bland, his enemies fangless, his friends are pacified—*they* are always the most difficult personages to assuage; his detractors go and detract from others; his creditors burn incense before him; his feminine acquaintances dress at him, talk at him, sing at him, and *look* at him—oh! so differently.

Cæsar needs all of his unusually powerful mental attributes if he does not become abominably conceited, and straightway refer the kindness of circumstance to his own inherent talent for calculation and brilliant combination. Let him haste to place yet higher stakes upon the tables, and after the usual fluctuation and flattery of the

Fiend, he arises one day ruined, undone, and despised by himself, neglected by others.

The fate of Ernest Neuchamp could never thus be told. Naturally too prudent in pecuniary matters to go much further than he had good warrant for, he was even alarmed at his present comparatively risky position. But he had adopted the advice of his best friend, whose former counsels had been accurately borne out in successful practice. He had taken time to consider. Wiser heads than his own were committed to the same results; and he was according to his custom, prepared to dismiss anxiety, and to await the issue.

Nor was he minded on this account to cut short his stay in Sydney. He determined, in accordance with his own feelings and Mr. Levison's suggestion, to give the management of the new station to his faithful henchman Jack Windsor, who, now that he was married and settled, would be all the better fitted to undertake a position of responsibility. As for Charley Banks, he should retain him as general manager of Rainbar. He ought not even to live there always himself. If it kept on raining and elevating the fat cattle market *ad infinitum*, the place could be managed with a 'long arm.' No reason to bury himself there for ever. He might even run home to England for a year or so.

Meanwhile it was not unpleasant to be congratulated at the club upon his improved prospects, and his spirited purchase of so extensive and well-known a property as Mildool. He commenced to divide the honour of rapid operation with Mr. Parklands, and found from day to day offers awaiting him of desirable properties situated north, south, east, and west, with any quantity and variety of stock, and of every sort and description of climate and

'country.' Mr. Parklands, to the ineffable disgust of Jermyn Croker, had already sold Booroo-booroo and Chatsworth at a profit of six thousand pounds, which Mr. Croker said he regarded as being taken out of his pocket, so to speak. Parklands had, moreover, the coolness to say that, if it had been worth his while to keep two such small stations on hand for a longer time, he could have made ten thousand as easily as the six. Mr. Croker objected to the claret and cookery more pointedly than usual that day, and the committee and the house steward had an evil time of it; that is, as far as contemptuous reference may have affected them.

Mr. Parklands, now truly in his element, indulged his fancy for unlimited speculation and locomotion to the fullest extent. He filled the Melbourne markets with store stock and fat stock, horses and sheep, working bullocks and milch cows, every possible variety of animal, except goats and swine. It was asserted that he *did* consider the nanny question, and calculated roughly whether a steamer-load of those miniature milchers would not pay decently. He ransacked Tasmania for oats, palings, and jam, and, no doubt, would have largely imported that other interesting product, of which the sister island has always yielded so bounteous a supply, could he have seen his way to a clearing-off sale when he landed the cargo. Finally, he dashed off to Adelaide for a slap at copper, and having taken a contract for 'ship cattle' for New Zealand, paused, like another Alexander, awaiting the discovery of fresh colonies in which he might revel in still more colossal operations.

## CHAPTER XXIX

A LETTER had been despatched to Mr. Windsor's address, of which his master had knowledge, requesting him to proceed to Sydney upon important business. Accordingly, at an early hour next day he presented himself at the club steps and greeted his employer with a subdued air of satisfaction, as if doubtful how far his recent decided action had met with approval.

'I am very glad to see you, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp; 'I hope Mrs. Windsor is well. I congratulate you both heartily. Yours was a spirited plan, and your success in the carrying out, or rather the carrying off, of my old friend Carry most enviable. I was afraid there might be obstacles. How did you arrange it all? Suppose you walk over to the Domain with me, and tell me all about it.'

Mr. Windsor, much doubting if this were the important business upon which he had been summoned to town, but not unwilling to relate the tale of his victory to so sympathising an auditor as he knew his master to be, thus commenced—

'You know, sir, I had a tightish ride to get over before I caught the mail. I felt very queer, I tell you, as if I didn't meet that identical coach I should never get down

in time. I was horrid frightened every time I thought about it, there's no mistake. I saved Ben Bolt as much as I could the first day and bandaged his legs when I got to the stable late at night. I did eighty miles that day, and dursn't go farther for fear I might crack him at the first burst. I was up with the stars and fed him. I didn't sleep much, you're sure, and at three in the morning I was off for a hundred mile ride! and that heat, *a man's life!* Mine wouldn't have mattered much afterwards, if I'd lost. I didn't feel gay just then, and I thought Ben Bolt walked out rather stiff. However, he put his ears back, and switched his tail sideways, as I mounted. That was a good sign. It was all plains, of course, soft, sandy road—couldn't be beat for smoothness, and firm, too. I kept him going in a steady hand-gallop, pulling him up only now and again during the forenoon. In the middle of the day I stopped for three good hours, gave him a middling feed—not too much, and got a little water; but he got a real good strapping. I stood over the feller doing it, and gave him half-a-crown.

'I'd done fifty miles between three and eleven—I wasn't going fast, you see—but of course the second fifty makes all the difference. I began to be afraid he was too big. The feed at Rainbar was awfully good, you know, sir; but as luck would have it, I'd given him some stiffish days after the farthest out cattle, and that had hardened him a bit.

'About two o'clock I cleared out again; saddled him myself; saw that his back was all right, and felt his legs, which were as cool and clean as if he hadn't gone a yard. I had the second fifty to do before twelve at night. That was the time the coach passed, and hardly waited a moment, either.

‘Off again, and I kept on steady at first, trusting to six miles an hour to do it in, and something to spare; but every now and again I kept thinking, thinking, suppose he goes lame all of a sudden! suppose he jacks up! suppose he falls, put his foot into a hole, or anything—rolls over me and gallops off, all the men in the world wouldn’t catch him! suppose I’m stopped by bushrangers—Red Cap’s out, you know;—why don’t they hang every scoundrel that turns out the moment he hoists his flag?’

‘Because they might reform, John,’ mildly interposed Mr. Neuchamp.

‘No fear—that is, mostly, sir,’ continued Jack apologetically; ‘but they wouldn’t have had the heart to stop me; and besides, I expect I could have dusted any of ’em with Ben.

‘Well, bushrangers or not, I got within twenty miles of Boree; and then my head got so full of fancies, that I settled to make a call on Ben Bolt, and do it in two hours. Suppose the coach was earlier than usual! No passengers, or only some young squatter, who wanted to go faster and to stop nowhere—and tipped the driver! I’ve seen these things done before now.

‘So I took the old horse by the head, gave him a hustle and a pull, and, by George, if you’ll believe me, sir, he went away with his mouth open, as if he hadn’t only been out to the Back Lake. The sun was down then, and the night air was coolish. But I knew the track well, and as we sailed along, Ben Bolt giving a kind of snort every now and then, same as he used to do when he didn’t know the place he was going to, I felt that I had the field beat, and the race as good as won. I thought I could see Carry a-beckonin’ to me at the



winning-post. I hardly think I pulled up three times, I felt that eager, and bound to win or die, before I saw the light of the Boree Inn, and the coach stables across the plain.

“Has the coach from down the river come in yet, Joe?” says I to the ostler, trembling all over.

“No, nor won’t be this hours yet; you needn’t have rode so fast.”

“I couldn’t afford to be late,” says I. “Lend us a rug while I cool my old horse a bit. He’s carried me well this day, if he never does another.”

‘Ben didn’t look beat—nor yet half beat. My belief is he could have done another twenty or thirty miles without cracking up. But a hundred miles is a hundred miles, and no foolish ride, even in this country where horses are as plenty as wallabies, such as they are, so I did my best for him. I let him rinse his mouth, and then I walked him up and down, with the rug on, for a solid hour. Of course he broke out at first, but he gradually dried and come all right. Before the coach started with me on board, he was doing nicely for the night, littered down (for we foraged some straw out of the bottled ale casks) and eating his feed just as he would after a longish day’s muster out back at Rainbar.’

‘I am very glad he carried you so well, John,’ said Mr. Neuchamp, at the conclusion of this antipodean Turpin’s ride; ‘but how did you speed in the last and most momentous stage?’

‘Oh, *that* was easy drafting enough,’ replied Mr. Windsor, who apparently had considered that portion of his matrimonial adventure which depended upon horse-flesh as the really important and exciting part of the transaction. ‘I was safe and sound in Parramatta on

the Thursday afternoon. I heard enough about the grand wedding for next day—but I never let on. Said I was off by sea to Queensland to look at some store cattle, and hired a trap, with a fairish horse, and a boy to mind it, which I drove down to the cross-roads, just about a mile from the “Cheshire Cheese.” There was an old wood-cutter’s hut just inside the fence at the corner. So I left the boy there, and told him to hold the horse among the trees, and not to go away till I came—if it wasn’t till dinner-time to-morrow. Of course, I squared him right. He was sharp enough; them Parramatta boys mostly are.

‘Down I goes to the old house, and marched in quite free and pleasant like, to spend the evening for the sake of old times. There was Carry looking half dull, half desperate, like a mountain filly three days in the pound—as I told her afterwards—though she was among her own people, in a manner of speaking.

‘There was Homminey, and some other Hawkesbury chaps, full of their jokes and fun—my word! if I could only have gone in at him and his best man, a great, slab-sided, six-foot-three fellow, just about as scraggy as he was tallowy, I think I could have spoilt both their figure-heads—one up and the other down.

‘However, there wouldn’t have been any sense in charging the whole family, like a knocked-up bullock meeting a picnic party—as I once saw, and didn’t he scatter ’em!—so I put on all the side I could, and laid by for a chance.

‘First of all, I shook hands with ’em all round, and came the warm-hearted fakement. Said “I’d come to say good-bye; they mustn’t think I bore any ill-will—just on my way to the north for store cattle, passage

taken and all—happened to hear of the wedding to-morrow, and thought I'd look in and wish 'em joy."

'Then, of course, I threw my money about—must have a round of drinks for luck. I never saw a publican yet that could refuse to serve a "shout." Then, of course, *they* must treat me, seeing I was behaving so handsome. Then I must have another round for all hands: and last of all, I gammoned to be a bit "sprung," and must propose the bride's health. So I made 'em fill up. Homminney's little round eyes was beginning to twinkle a bit, and old Walton was getting affectionate, but Carry's mother watched us both like a cat. I said, "I knowed the bride these two years or more, and I proposed her health, and that of the good-hearted, honest, straightforward chap as was going to marry her to-morrow morning." This fetched 'em about a bit. I said, "I'd knowed him a goodish while, and heard tell of him, too, and a better feller couldn't be. After he was married he'd be still better,—a deal better, *that* I could safely go bail for. He couldn't help it, with such a wife. I therefore gave the health of Miss Carry Walton and her husband that was to be, to-morrow, and no heel-taps." I never proposed my own health before.

'Well, Homminney, after this, came over and squeezed my hand in his great mutton fist, and looked at me, as if he wasn't quite sure; then he bust out and said I was a real good-natured chap, as didn't bear malice, and I'd always be welcome at Richmond Point.

"Right you are, old corn-cob," says I; "I'll come and see you the very first time you ask me. And now let's have a bit of a dance to finish up with, for my time's short, and I must be off. The steamer leaves at daylight."

‘Well, between the grog, and being that glad to get rid of me, that they’d have done anything to see my back, they all agreed to it. There were three or four other girls there; one of ’em, his cousin, was fourteen stone if she was a pound. I gave her a few turns when the music struck up, and then turned to Carry, quite promiskus, directly the tune was altered.

“‘Oh dear, oh dear, why did you come?’” she said in a low tone; “‘wasn’t I miserable enough before?’”

“‘You know the cross-roads?’” I says, knocking against the tall chap’s partner to drown the words. “‘There’s no time for talking. If you’re as true to me as I am to you, will you do as I tell you?’”

“‘You know I will,’” she said; “‘what can I do?’”

“‘Can you get out of your bedroom?’” I says.

“‘No. I don’t know. Yes—perhaps. I think I can,” she said in a strange voice, not a bit like her own.

“‘Then get away the moment you get to bed—don’t stop to take anything with you, but make straight for the cross-roads. Inside the trees you’ll see a buggy with a boy. Stay with him till I come. It will be there till daylight and long afterwards. Will you come, Carry?’”

“‘If I don’t come I shall be mad, or locked up, or dead,” she said, with such a miserable look on her face that I could hardly help kissing her and comforting her before them all.

‘Now, the old woman helped us, without wanting to, for she says, “Carry, you’re looking like a washed-out print frock; do, for gracious sake, go to bed, and sleep away your headache. She’s not been well lately, Mr. Windsor, and she’s flustered like at seeing strangers, not but what you’ve behaved most gentlemanly.”’

“I’m afraid she’s thinkin’ about her wedding-dress or her veil, or something,” says I. “I wish I could stay and see how she looks to-morrow, but I can’t, and business is business.”

‘Poor Carry was off before this, with just “Good-night all,” which made Homminey look rather glum. I ordered another round, saying I must be off; but when it was drunk and paid for, I stayed half an hour before I shook hands, most hearty, and walked out.

‘The moment I turned the corner of the garden-fence I started off, and ran that mile up to the cross-roads as if all the blacks on Cooper’s Creek was after me. Just as I got to the trap I overtook a woman, with a large bundle, labouring along. It never could be—yes *it was*—Carry!

‘I first kissed her and then scolded her. “Never a woman born,” I said, “that could do without a bundle. Why didn’t you leave all that rubbish? ain’t you good enough for me as you are?”

“Oh, John,” says she, “would you have me come to you in my—in my one frock? Nonsense! every woman must have a little dress.”

“Suppose you had been caught?”

“But I’m not caught, except by a bushranger, or some wild character,” says she, smiling for the first time. “I’m afraid poor Harry will not enjoy his dinner to-morrow.”

“Hang him and his dinner!” said I. “He’s all dinner. I’ve half a mind to go back and murder him now.”

‘But instead of that, we made haste for Appin, after giving the boy a pound. And, to make a long story short, were married there *that day*, for it was past twelve

o'clock. And Carry's there with my old mother now, and very proud she is of her.'

'I see, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'that you have carried out one enterprise with your usual success. The other one I want you for, now, is to start at once for Rainbar, and to take delivery of Mildool run and stock, which I bought last week. They agree to muster in six weeks. And you can tell Carry—Mrs. Windsor, I beg her pardon—that she is the overseer's wife at Mildool. I have decided to give you the management of that run, and I look for wonderful profits from it all this season.'

'And you'll get 'em, sir,' said Mr. Windsor, 'if there's any faith in a fust chop season, and right-down hard work. God Almighty's given us the fust, and if Jake Windsor don't find the second, he wishes his right arm may rot off to the shoulder.'

'I have no doubt that you will do your best, John,' answered Mr. Neuchamp, much gratified by the warm gratitude exhibited by one whose fate at one time lay in his hand; whose after-career had done so much to justify his anxiety for the welfare of his fellow-man. 'I have no doubt that Mildool will be the best-managed station on the river—after Rainbar, of course; and that there will be a splendid increase this year,—always providing that no calf bears my brand—and never mistake me on that score—that cannot be honestly provided with a mother of the same ownership.'

Mr. Windsor made a slight gesture of compulsory resignation, as of one who feels himself bound down to superhuman purity; but he said, 'You shall be obeyed in that, sir; and in every other thing you choose to order; though it will come queer to the old hands at Mildool, if all tales are true, to kill their own beef, let alone



mothering their calves. But *your word's my law!* And I see now that going straight is the best in the end, whether in big things or little. We'll be off to-morrow, Carry and I, and she can hang it out at Rainbar and have Tot Freeman to talk to—those chaps ain't left yet, I believe—while I'm taking over the cattle at Mildool.'

'That will do very well, John. Meanwhile you can let a contract for a neat six-roomed cottage at Mildool, as there isn't a place there fit for Piambook and his gin to live in. You must consult your wife about the site of it, though, as she will have to live in it and spend many a day by herself there. Don't let her regret the snug parlour and the old orchard at the "Cheshire Cheese," eh, John?'

'Well, it *is* a great change, now I come to think of it,' said Mr. Windsor, the first expression of distrust coming over his bold features that had been there exhibited since his successful raid upon the lowlanders. 'I daresay she *would* feel struck all of a heap if she was to come upon Mildool old station sudden-like, with the dog-holes of huts, and every tree cut down on the sandhill because the men were too lazy to go out for firewood, or for fear the blacks might sneak on them, and the pile of bones, like a boiling down round the gallows. But, thank God! there's grass now, and there's fat cattle enough in Mildool by this time—for they've never sent away a beast this season, I hear—to build an Exhibition, if it's wanted. Carry's got me, and I've got her, that's the main thing; and I think we shall make shift to jog along. We've got to do it, and no two ways about it. So, good-bye, sir. When shall we see you at Rainbar?'

'I am afraid that business will detain me in Sydney for some weeks longer,' said Mr. Neuchamp thoughtfully,

as if mentally calculating the exact day on which he might quit the metropolis. 'But you and Mr. Banks will be able to manage the muster easy enough.'

'Not a bit of bother there need be about it, that I can see, sir. We shall have lots of help; every stockman within a hundred miles will be there. There'll be an awful big mob of strangers; and the Drewarrina poundkeeper hasn't had such a lift for many a day as he'll get. We must square the tails of every beast that's counted, that's one thing, so as not to have 'em played on to us twice over. I think Mr. Banks is down to most moves about cattle work, and what he don't know I can tell him. Good-bye, sir.'

'By the way, John,' said Mr. Neuchamp, 'I shall want you to stay in town this evening, if you can spare so much time away from Carry. I have to see about the draft copy of the sale agreement, which you will take up with you and give to Mr. Banks. Mr. Frankston informs me that these agreements need to be very strictly carried out, and that advantageous purchases *have* been evaded from neglect in doing so. So come out to Morahmee this afternoon, when you can have my final instructions.'

Mr. Neuchamp spent the morning in tolerably close attendance upon lawyers and persons addicted to the drawing up of those paper and parchment promises which, if honour were binding, need never to have troubled penman or engrosser. Nathless, human nature being what it is, and retaining simian tendencies to steal, hide, falsely chatter and closely clutch, the sheepskin may not be safely relinquished. Before Mr. Neuchamp bethought himself of the mid-day solace of lunch he was possessed of a legal document, wherein the exact time granted for mustering and several other leading conditions

were set forth with such clearness that evasion or misunderstanding seemed impossible.

A copy of this all-important document was posted to Charley Banks ; he brought with him another for the use of Mr. Windsor, who might employ his leisure time on the journey up in learning it by heart, and so render himself able to meet all comers respecting its provisions.

Antonia had expressed a wish to see Jack Windsor, and to send a message to his wife before he left town. For this reason chiefly Ernest had appointed Morahmee as the rendezvous on this particular afternoon. As the shadows lengthened, Mr. Neuchamp betook himself in that direction, as indeed he had done daily for weeks past.

It so chanced that, on the evening before, Antonia had received a pink triangular note from Miss Harriet Folleton, who was more or less a friend of hers, to say that she intended to come and lunch with her next day at Morahmee, and would be there, unless her dear Antonia wrote to say she couldn't have her. There was not any great similitude of taste or disposition between the two girls—one indeed much disapproved of the other. But those who have noted the ways of their *monde* will not decide from this statement that Antonia Frankston and Harriet Folleton did any the less greet one another with kisses and effusion when meeting, or say farewell with lavish use of endearing epithets.

Such being the state of matters, it was by no means surprising that Harriet Folleton, a girl of great beauty and soft, enthralling manner, but of so moderate a development of intellect that she might have been called, if any one had been so rudely uncompromising as to speak the unvarnished truth about so pretty a creature,

‘a fool proper,’ should arrive in the paternal brougham before mid-day, and therefore share luncheon with her dear Antonia in much innocence and peace.

It would have been even less surprising to any one who had possessed the requisite leisure and opportunity to study that fair girl’s ways, that, as the two friends were strolling near the strand, where a giant fig-tree shadowed half the little bay, a boat should pull round the adjoining headland, manned by four man-of-war-looking yachtsmen, with the *White Falcon* on their breasts and hat-ribbons, while from the boat, as she ran up to the jetty, stepped the gracious form of Count von Schätterheims.

‘Why, you naughty girl,’ said Antonia, instantly divining the ruse, ‘I do believe you planned to meet the Count here, and disobey your father. So this coming to see me was all deception! How dare you treat me like this? I have a great mind to tell your father, and never speak to you again.’

‘Oh, pray don’t, Antonia dearest,’ whimpered the softly insincere one, ‘I only said I *might* be here this afternoon; and he said he was going off to Batavia, or Russia, or India, or somewhere. And papa was so dreadful, that I thought there was no harm in it. I shall never see him again—oh!’ Here the despairingly undecided damsel commenced to weep, and so interfere with the natural charms of her fine and uncommon complexion, that Antonia, inwardly resolving to restrict the acquaintance to conventional limits in future, was constrained to soothe and console her. Meanwhile the Count, who had been engaged in an earnest colloquy with his crew, advanced with his customary gallantry to meet them.

‘ My boad is on de zhore  
And my barg is on de zea ;

is not dat the voord of your boet ? I come to make farevell to you, Miss Frankstein ; to you, Miss Folledon, to lay at your veet dis hertz—mein hertz—vich is efer for dee so vondly beating.’

‘ And are you really going to leave us, Count ? ’ asked Antonia, without any particular interest or otherwise in the noble foreigner, of whom she was becoming wearied and increasingly distrustful. Then happening to look at Harriet Folleton’s face, she saw that she was deathly pale, and trembled as if about to fall. The Count, too, though complimentary as usual, seemed annoyed and uneasy at her presence.

The Count, in answer to the question, pointed to his yacht, a beautiful schooner, more fair than honest of aspect, and of marvellous sailing powers, which had, perhaps, more than any of his reported possessions, tended to sustain his prestige since his arrival in Sydney.

Antonia’s practised eye at once discerned that she was fully equipped for sea. With sails ready to be unfurled at a moment’s notice, she could sweep out unchallenged and trackless as the falcon on her ensign, before the freshening south wind which was even now curling the waves with playful but increasing power.

With lightning rapidity she divined the full extent of the girl’s imprudence and the Count’s villainy. In the same sudden mental effort she resolved, at all hazards, to save her companion from the consequences of her inconceivable folly.

‘ I did vorm de resolution dat I shall bezeegh you and Miss Folledon to honour me by paying me von last

leettle visit on board de *Valgon*, dis afdernoon. Mine goot friend Paul, he was goming, but de business—dat pete noir—he brevent him. He ask me to peg Miss Frankstein if she vill, zo also Miss Folledon, vizout her fader, to my so-poor-yet-highly-to-be-honoured graft go. Dere is izes, one small collation, a few friend. Surely you will join dem ?’

Here the Count beamed the irresistible smile which had through life served him well, and advancing, held out both hands to the young ladies.

‘Oh, do let us go !’ said the reassured weakling. ‘It would be so pleasant. It is such a delightful afternoon. I should like it of all things.’

But Antonia more than ever distrusted the Count, *et dona ferentes*. She disliked his eye, his wily words, the appearance of his swarthy crew, the evidently sea-fitted appearance of the yacht. She felt more than ever convinced that he had matured a deliberate plot to carry off an unsuspecting girl.

Such in truth was the unpardonable sin with which the Herr von Schätterheims had resolved to conclude his Australian career. Unable to meet the many pressing claims upon his finances, the holders of which, he had reason to know, were meditating an advance in line ; having failed in the daring speculations in which, by means of humble foreign agents, he had invested the small capital with which he had arrived, and the incredibly large loans which his assurance and reputation for wealth had enabled him to procure,—he had conceived the desperate plan which Antonia’s quick intuition had discovered. He had determined, by force or fraud, to carry off Harriet Folleton, trusting that the irrevocable *coup* once made, time and other considerations would tend



to the ultimate wresting of her immense fortune from her father's hands.

Hunted by his creditors and threatened with imprisonment, the Count was now desperate. In such a position he had, more than once during his career, showed no disposition to stick at trifles. His yacht lay within hail—a seabird with her great wings plumed for instant flight, a Norway falcón looking on ocean from a low-placed rocky ridge. His crew of mixed nationality, who had followed him through many a clime, were lawless and devoted. The hour had come when Albert von Schätterheims would stand forth with front unveiled, and show these simple dwellers by the shore of the southern main what manner of man they had dared to drive to bay.

Therefore, when Antonia Frankston stepped forward, and with head erect and flashing eye interposed between the Count and his sacrifice, she confronted a different man from the silky, graceful *serviteur des dames* with whom she had often wished, for some instinctive reason, to quarrel.

‘I cannot go with you now, nor shall Miss Folleton, Count Schätterheims; it would not be right, in my father's absence. Permit us to return to the house.’

‘Beholt me desoladed if Miss Frankstein will not honour my poor boad,’ said the Count, as he barred the progress of the two young ladies on the somewhat narrow green-walled alley which led to the house; ‘but’—fixing his eye steadily upon Harriet Folleton—‘I go not forth alone; Miss Harriet Folledon, you bromised me. I haf your vord. You vill come with me now; is it not so, belofet one? Ja! you vill follow de fortunes of Albert von Schätterheims, for efer.’

He strode forward a pace, and seizing the wrist of the frightened girl, spoke rapidly in Spanish, while two of his sailors ran up from the boat, to whom he committed the half-insensible form of the fainting girl.

Antonia Frankston did not faint or swoon. With sudden movement she confronted the Count, with so fierce an air and so unblenching a brow that he involuntarily stepped back a pace, and made as though to protect himself from the onset of a foe.

‘Coward and robber that you are, release her this instant,’ she cried.

The Count smiled sardonically. ‘You will parton me, mademoiselle, if I return you with my compliment for your goot opinion. My engagemends is more pressing, as you gan pelief.’

On the girl’s face, as she stood with threatening aspect—a young Bellona, as yet unversed in battles—burned a deeper glow; in her eye flashed a fiercer light as she marked the smile on the calm features of the Count, which, in her heated fancy, seemed the mocking regard of a fiend.

‘She shall *not* go!’ cried she, springing forward and throwing her arms round the neck of the helpless maid. ‘Oh that my father were here—or Ernest—— Robbers, villains, assassins that you are, release her—don’t dare to touch *me*!’

But at this moment, at a signal from their chief, the dark-browed, swarthy seamen laid their rude hands upon the sacred form of the deliverer herself, and rapidly hurried both damsels towards the gig. With one wild look to heaven, one frantic gesture of wrath, despair, and abandonment, Antonia Frankston betook herself to one of the best weapons in her sex’s armoury, and shrieked till

every rock and tree within a mile of Morahmee echoed again.

‘*Caramba!*’ said one of the men, ‘we shall have half Sydney here before we are clear with these shrieking *senoritas*; have you no muffler for her cursed mouth?’

‘*Paciencia*, Diego!’ said the Count, ‘harm her not. A few minutes will suffice—and then——’

But before further infraction of the liberty of the subject could be carried out, Miss Frankston had exhibited for some moments the full force of a very vigorous pair of lungs. The party had nearly reached the little pier, whence so many joyous bands had taken the water, when a man came crashing through the shrubbery, and rushed furiously at Von Schätterheims.

‘Stand back, Neuchamp!’ shouted the Count, levelling a revolver, ‘or you die.’

‘Scoundrel and pirate that you are,’ said Ernest, facing him with steady eye, ‘fire! do your worst. By heaven, I will tear you limb from limb if you do not instantly order your ruffians to desist.’

This rather melodramatic threat was used by Mr. Neuchamp, who was cool enough to take in the precise aspect of the fray at a glance, more with the intention of gaining time than of intimidating five armed men.

He was eminently at a disadvantage as matters stood. He was, so to speak, at the Count’s mercy, being at the wrong end of his revolver, and that experienced soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, or whatever, indeed, in time past might have been his true designation, was far too wary to permit him a chance of closing.

The sailors in whose grasp were Antonia and her guest had drawn their knives, and were prepared for an affray *à l’outrance*. The two seamen in the boat carried

sheath-knives at least. He could not but admit to himself, grinding his teeth the while, that he had the hazard of beholding his love torn from her home by the rude hands of lawless men, or of dying vainly in her defence.

To this latter alternative, could it but avert her peril, he was willing, nay anxious, to yield himself. But if—if only a short respite could be gained—even now—the issue was uncertain. His resolution was taken.

‘Stop your men, Count, while we parley,’ he said, ‘or, by the God above us, you shall shoot me down the next second, and I tear the false heart out of your breast, if you miss. Choose!’ And he stepped forward in the face of the levelled weapon.

‘You are mat, like every dummer Englander, I pelief,’ said the nineteenth-century buccaneer. ‘Why should I not kill you for your insults to my honour? But I revrain. I would not meddle with the Fräulein Frankstein—she dell you herself, but she try to rop me of my shpirit-star—my schatz—bromised prite—I presend her to you. I know your sendimend for her. I make you my complimend. Her dempers is angelig.’

Here the Count wreathed his face into such a smile as the companion of Faust may have worn when Marguerite implores the Mater Dolorosa, and spoke rapidly with commanding gesture to his myrmidons, who released their hold upon Miss Frankston. But Antonia still clung with desperate tenacity to the cold hands, the corpse-like form of Harriet Folleton.

‘You see she is obstinate—to the death,’ said the Count, whose moustache seemed to curl with wrath. ‘It is not her affair, or yours; go in beace, gross not my path more furder.’

‘I cannot abandon Miss Folleton, nor will Antonia,’

said Mr. Neuchamp, raising his voice so as to drown a peculiar crackling noise in the shrubbery which his ear had caught. 'Do *you* go in peace, Von Schätterheims? Wrong not further the kind hearts that have trusted you; betray not hospitality free and open as ever man received. I will return with both, or not at all.'

'Then die, fool!' hissed the Count, as he raised his weapon and fired full at the head of Ernest Neuchamp, who at the same moment rushed in and closed, while his blood flowed freely from a wound in the forehead, and ensanguined his adversary as they grappled in deadly conflict.

The accuracy of the Count's aim, faultless and unerring in gallery practice, or at the *poupée*, of which he could drill heart, head, or limb, five times out of six, may or may not have been shaken by the sudden apparition of Jack Windsor, or by the portentous yell which that gentleman emitted, worthy of Piambook or Boimmaroo, as he observed the Count in the act of firing at the sacred head of his benefactor.

Too late to interpose with effect as he stood on a block of sandstone overlooking the scene of conflict, he raised his voice in one of the half-Indian cries with which the horsemen of the Central Desert are wont to intimidate the unwilling herd at the stockyard-gates. The sailors started and gazed with astonishment as Mr. Windsor sprang recklessly from his elevated post, and cleared the rough declivity with a succession of bounds, emulating, not unworthily, the hard-pressed 'flyer' of his country's forests when the grim gazehounds are close on haunch and flank.

Straight as a line for the men that held the captive maids went the henchman, and as they hurriedly released

their prey and stood on guard, Mr. Neuchamp could have offered a votary's prayer to the patron saint of old England's weaponless gladiators, as he marked the unarmed Anglo-Saxon's rapid unswerving onset.

Though there, the western mountaineer  
Rushed with bare bosom on the spear,  
And flung the feeble targe aside,  
And with both hands the broadsword plied.

Mr. Windsor so far resembled Donald at Flodden Field, that he trusted chiefly to natural strength and courage. But none the less did he display an amount of coolness and cunning of fence characteristically Australian.

Charging the nearest Frenchman, as he took him to be, and indeed in all future relation so described him, with the velocity of a mallee three-year-old, he feinted with his right hand at the forehead of his foe, and as the Mexican-Spaniard, for such he was, raised his arm for a deadly stab, he suddenly gripped his wrist, catching him full in the face with the 'terrible left,' and stretched him senseless and bleeding at his feet. Snatching up the knife, he had but time to parry a stroke which shrewdly scored his right arm, when his other antagonist was upon him. Both men glared at one another with uplifted knives—for a moment; in the next Mr. Windsor swept his antagonist's outstretched foot from under him with a Cornish wrestler's trick—a lift—a dull thud, and he lay on his back, with Jack's knee on his chest and the dangerous knife in the bushman's belt.

In the meanwhile Miss Frankston, perceiving that the men who had charge of the boat showed no disposition to quit their station, half dragged, half raised Miss Folleton along the path to the verandah steps, halting just within sight of the combatants.



‘Now, do you prefer being dragged up to the house, Von Schätterheims?—by Jove! I shoot you where you stand if you resist,’ inquired Ernest of that nobleman, whom he had mastered after a severe struggle, and whose revolver he now pointed at those classical features, ‘or will you depart in God’s name, and rid us of your presence for ever?’

‘It is Fate,’ said the Count gloomily. ‘He is too strong. My shtar is under an efil influence. I will quid dese accurset lants. Let your man—teufel dat he is with his boxanglais—release my grew, and I go; but stay—I am guildy by your laws; why should you release me?’

‘You deserve death for your outrage,’ replied Ernest sternly. ‘You could hardly escape lifelong imprisonment. But I would not willingly see the man, at whose board I have sat, in the felon’s cell. Go, and repent. Also—and this is my chief reason—I would willingly evade the *eschandre* which your public trial for this day’s proceedings would cause.’

‘Ha! not the deet. But the fama—what you call “scandall,”’ said the Count wonderingly. ‘But you English, you are as efer, a strange—a so wunderlich beoples. Still, I go. It is all that is left to Albert von Schätterheims in this hemis-vahr—to steal away, like the hund, beaden, disgraced, dishonoured. Fahrwohl. Dell to the Fräulein my regret, my despair, my shames. Under another shtar Albert von Schätterheims mighd haf geliebt und gelebt—but all dings is now ofer.’

Ernest stepped back and motioned him to arise, still keeping guard. The Count called aloud to his men, one of whom still lay beneath Mr. Windsor’s thrall, and the other sitting up, all blood-stained, swayed backward and forward, as only half recovered from a swoon.

‘Let your men go, John,’ said Mr. Neuchamp. ‘The treaty of Morahmee is arranged between the high contracting powers. They will not renew the war,’ he continued, as the Count and Jack’s last antagonist between them raised the fainting man and led him down to the gig, which in the briefest period was seen heading for the yacht as fast as oars could drive her.

‘My word, sir,’ said Mr. Windsor, ‘it looked very crooked when I come on the ground. I saw that frog-eating mounseer potting you with his squirt like a tree’d ’possum—both the young ladies, too, being run off to sea with, clean and clear against their wills. I don’t hold with that sea business at all—it’s dangerous—let alone with a boss like the Count, who’s wanted in his own country, like as not. However, we euchred ’em this time, whoever plays next game.’

‘You behaved like a trump, Jack. You were my genuine “right bower,”’ said Mr. Neuchamp with unwonted humour and heartiness. ‘Without you we should never have won the odd trick. I knew that you were just behind me at Woolloomooloo; but I was terribly afraid that you could not be up in time.’

‘If one John Windsor’s anyways handy when you’re in trouble, sir, you’ll mostly find him there or thereabouts, as long as he’s alive, that is. I can’t say afterwards. What do you think, sir, about what comes after all this rough-and-tumble that we coves call life?’ demanded Jack with sudden interest.

‘I don’t think too much about it, which is perhaps the best wisdom. But of this we may be sure, John, that no man will fare worse in the other world for doing his duty as a man and a Christian in this.’

. . . . .

When the house was reached, it appeared that Miss Folleton had been handed over to the good offices of her friend's maid, and was recovering her nervous system in the seclusion of a guest-chamber. Antonia, having smoothed her hair, and rearranged herself generally, awaited the victor in the verandah. She stood gazing seawards with a haughty air of defiance, which still savoured of the fray. The light of battle had not faded from her eye; a bright flush embellished with rare and wondrous beauty the untinted marble of her delicate features.

As she stood, unconsciously statuesque, and gazed half unheeding in her rapt regard of the flying bark, the long-loved, fast-thronging, magical glories of the evening ocean-pageant,

. . . the day was dying :  
Sudden the sun shone forth ; its beams were lying  
Like boiling gold on ocean, strange to see ;  
And on the shattered vapours, which defying  
The power of light in vain, tossed restlessly  
In the red heaven like wrecks in a tempestuous sea.

‘It is you,’ she said, suddenly turning towards Ernest with a look of praise and gratitude almost childlike in its absence of reserve. ‘How can I, how will my father, ever thank you for this day’s deeds? I had given up all for lost; that is, as far as that foolish Harriet was concerned. They should have torn me limb from limb before they should have placed us in their boat. Then I determined to fight for Harriet, to—yes! I believe that is the word, for I really felt the real fighting spirit all over—it is not such a very unpleasant sensation as one would think. I was quite *exaltée*, and if I had had a revolver, I think the Count would have paid forfeit

with his life, whatever might have come after. Papa would kill him now if they met.'

'Is there no fear of such a meeting?'

'None, thank Heaven!' said Antonia, 'though he deserves the worst in the shape of punishment. Sydney has seen the last of him. Look!' she cried, as every sail on the long, low, beautiful schooner filled as if by magic, and the graceful craft, leaning to the full force of the strong south wind, swept forth towards the sea-way.

'He is safe from pursuit,' she continued, 'even if tidings could have been sent at the instant. With this breeze behind him, there is nothing in Sydney which would not be hull down behind the *White Falcon* before day broke. Of course he will steer for one of the northern ports, or else for the Islands. They must have had every sail tied with spun-yarn, so as to be ready to unfurl at a moment's notice. To you alone, and to that brave Jack Windsor, it is due that we are not miserable captives in yonder flying bark. I shudder to think of it.'

'I should have done little without John,' said Mr. Neuchamp. 'He came up like Blücher at Waterloo, and I was as impatiently awaiting his arrival as the Duke. Here—receive Miss Frankston's thanks, John; then, with her permission, you can go and ask the butler for some beer. I daresay you feel equal to it.'

'You have behaved this day, John Windsor, like a brave man and a true Australian,' said Antonia, giving her hand to Jack, which he shook carefully and with much caution, relinquishing the dainty palm with evident relief. 'My father will know how to thank the rescuer of his daughter; and she will remember you as a gallant fellow and a friend in need all the days of her life.'

‘Thank you, miss,’ said Mr. Windsor, with a respectful yet puzzled air. ‘I’ve had many a worse shindy than this in my time, and got no thanks either—tother way on, indeed. But of course I couldn’t help rolling in, seeing the master double-banked, and you young ladies being made to join a water-party against your wills. Don’t you have no more truck with them boats, miss: they’re too uncertain altogether. Nothing like dry land to my taste; even if the season’s bad, there’s a something to hang on by. My respects, miss, and I’ll try that beer; my throat’s like a bark chimney with the soot afire.’

‘And now I must order you, Mr. Neuchamp, to betake yourself to your room. Look in the glass and see if your complexion hasn’t suffered. Was it the Count’s blood which flowed, or did you scratch your face with the prickly pear hedge? Let me look! Merciful heaven!’ exclaimed the girl, with a half scream, as she narrowly scanned her deliverer’s face; ‘why, there is the deep trace of a bullet on your temple. How providential that it was the least bit wide—a slight turn of your head—a shade nearer the temple, and you would have been lying there dead—dead! How awful to think of!’

Here she covered her face with her hands. Tears trickled through the slender palms as her overwrought feelings found relief in a sudden burst of weeping.

Mr. Neuchamp’s attempts at consolation would appear not to have been wholly ineffectual, if one may judge from the concluding sentences of rather a long-whispered conversation, all carried on prior to the lavation of his gory countenance.

‘I always thought,’ said Antonia, smiling through her tears, with as much satirical emphasis as could coexist

with so sudden an access of happiness, 'that you wanted some one to take care of you in Australia. I fear I have been led into undertaking a very serious responsibility.'

'May it not be the other way?' very naturally inquired Ernest. 'If I had not been, as Jack would say, "there or thereabouts" to-day, some one might have been a pirate's bride, after all. Miss Folleton, of course, had prior claims, but——'

'But—please to go and render yourself presentable, this instant. We shall have such an amount of talking to do before we can put poor dear old pappy in possession of all the news. Good gracious, how can we ever tell him? How furious he will be!'

'Will he?' inquired Ernest, with affected apprehension; 'perhaps we had better defer our——'

'I don't mean *that*—and you know it, sir; but, unless you wish to be taken for a pirate yourself, or an escaped I-don't-know-what, you will do as I tell you.'

So Ernest was fain to do as he was bid, commencing, unconsciously indeed, that period of servitude to which every son of Adam, all unheeding, is pledged who rivets on himself the flower-wreathed adamantine fetters of matrimony. He sought Mr. Frankston's extremely comfortable dressing-room, at the behest of his beloved *châtelaine*; and very glad he was to find himself there.

His sense of relief and general congratulation was, however, slightly alloyed by the thought of the stupendous amount of explanation and narrative due to Paul Frankston, when this now fast-approaching hour of dinner should arrive.

'I would it were bedtime, and all well,' groaned he,



in old Falstaff's words, as he addressed himself to the rather serious duties of the toilette.

Mr. Frankston arrived from town but a few minutes before the dinner-hour, and, like a wise man, made at once for his room.

'Only just time to dress, darling,' said he to his daughter. 'Got such a budget of news; met Croker just as I was coming out, tell Ernest. No end of news—quite unparalleled. You will be surprised, and so will he.'

'And so will you,' thought Mr. Neuchamp, who just came into the hall in time to hear the concluding sentence. But he darkly bided his time.

As the dinner-bell rang, forth issued Mr. Frankston, radiant with snowy waistcoat and renovated *personnel*, having the air at once of a man in good hope and expectation of dinner, also conscious of the possession of news which, however sensationally disastrous, does not prejudicially affect himself.

'Now then,' he said, the soup having been disposed of, and the mildly stimulating Amontillado imbibed, 'what do you think has become of our friend—or, rather, your friend, Antonia, for you never would let me abuse him—the Count von Schätterheims?'

'What indeed?' replied Antonia, looking at her plate.

'Well, he has bolted, levanted, cleared out, on board his famous yacht, the *White Falcon*, for some northern port—Batavia, the Islands, New Guinea—no one knows.'

'How about money matters?' inquired Ernest.

'Well, you both take it coolly, I must say,' said Paul, hurt at the small effect of his great piece of ordnance.

‘As to money, all Sydney, in the legitimate credit way, is left lamenting. He had been operating very largely of late, and his losses and defalcations are immense. Yorick and Co.’s bill for wines and liqueurs is something awful.’

‘Alas, poor Yorick!’ said Ernest, with so pathetic an emphasis that Antonia could not help laughing.

‘You two seem very facetious to-night,’ quoth Paul with dignity. ‘It is no laughing matter, I can tell you. But you won’t laugh at *this*, I fancy. Croker told me that it was everywhere believed that he had persuaded that unhappy, infatuated girl Harriet Folleton to accompany him in his flight.’

Mr. Frankston uttered these last words with a deep solemnity, imparted to his voice by the heartfelt pity which, at any time, he could have felt for the victim in such a case.

His daughter and Ernest were sufficiently ill-bred to laugh.

‘Hang me if I understand this!’ he commenced, in tones of righteous indignation; and then, softening, ‘Why Antonia, dearest, surely you must pity——’

‘Papa, she is upstairs and in bed at this very moment, so she can’t have run away with the Count. There must be a mistake somewhere.’

‘So there must, so there must,’ said Paul, instantly mollified, and addressing himself to his dinner. ‘I’m a hot-tempered old idiot, I know. But there’s no mistake about the Count’s debts, or the Count’s flight. He was sighted by No. 4 pilot cutter that brought in the English liner, the *Cumberland*, this evening, steering nor’-nor’-east, and before such a breeze as will see him clear of anything from this port before daylight.’

‘He has gone, safe enough,’ said Ernest; ‘indeed, we watched him go through the Heads from the verandah—a most fortunate migration, in my opinion. He has conferred an immense benefit upon the country by leaving it, which I trust he will confirm by never returning.’

‘Then you saw him go from here?’ inquired Mr. Frankston. ‘Was he close enough for you to see him?’

‘Well,’ admitted Ernest, ‘he certainly *was* close enough to see, and, indeed, to feel; but it’s rather a long story, and if you’re going to smoke this evening, we can have it all out on the verandah.’

‘I think I must go and see how my visitor is getting on,’ said Antonia; ‘and as I feel tired, I will make my farewell for the evening.’

Was there in the outwardly formal handshaking a sudden instinctive pressure? Was there in the hasty glance a lighting up of hitherto lambent fires in the clear depths of Antonia’s deep-hued eyes—an added, half-remorseful, half-clinging tenderness in the never-omitted caress which marked her evening parting with her father? If so, that father was all unconscious, and the outward tokens were so faint as to have been invisible to all but one deeply interested, near-sighted observer.

‘I am much relieved to find that poor girl Harriet Folleton has not been carried off, after all, by that scoundrel, who has taken us all in so splendidly,’ growled Paul. ‘Of course, now the mischief is done, all kinds of reports are going about the city as to his real character. People say he was a valet, or a courier; others, a super-cargo, who ran away with that pretty boat he brought here. He certainly had a very good notion of handling a yacht.’

‘Let me tell you, then, that it is chiefly owing to your daughter’s courage and unselfish determination to save her friend at all hazards, that Harriet Folleton is not now a captive in yonder yacht, hopelessly lost and disgraced,’ announced Mr. Neuchamp, commencing his broadside.

‘Why, you don’t tell me that the scoundrel came *here* and attempted any violence?’ said the old man, rising excitedly and performing the regulation quarter-deck walk up and down the verandah, while he dashed his ignited cigar excitedly out over the lawn. ‘If I knew—if I had known this day that he dared to set his foot upon these grounds with a lawless purpose towards any guest of Antonia’s, I’d have followed him to the Line and hanged him at his own yardarm.’

As the old man uttered these very decided sentiments, somewhat at variance with the Navigation Act and international usage, his brow darkened, his eye gleamed with pitiless light, and his arm was raised with a gesture which indicated familiarity with the cutlass and the boarding-pike.

‘You must not excite yourself,’ said Ernest, laying his hand kindly on the old man’s arm. ‘Remember, first of all, that the offender is beyond pursuit; that he was baulked in his evil purpose, and that he suffered ignominious defeat, chiefly through the timely help of Jack Windsor, who assisted me to rout the attacking force.’

‘Good God!’ exclaimed the old man. ‘Attack—defeat; what has happened? and I sat gossiping at the club, while you were defending my home and my honour!’

‘Could I do less? However, you had better hear the

whole story straight out. No harm has been done, and the enemy was routed with loss.'

The story was told. Full justice was done to Antonia's heroism. Jack Windsor's prowess received its meed of praise. His own fortunate overthrow of the Count by good luck and a little more practice in wrestling than continental usages render familiar, was slightly alluded to. Finally, he explained his reasons for assisting the escape of Von Schütterheims, and thereby confining the scandal of his attempted abduction to the narrow limit of the actual participators in the affray.

Mr. Frankston walked the deck of a long-departed imaginary vessel so long without speaking that Ernest feared some rending typhoon of wrath after the enforced calm. But the event justified his best surmises. Placing his hand upon his guest's arm, Paul said, in a voice vibrating with emotion—

'I see in you, Ernest Neuchamp, a man who this day has saved my honour and my life—hers, to whom this poor remnant of existence is but as this worthless weed.' (Here he cast from him the half-consumed cigar.) 'From this day forth you are my son—take everything that I can give. Paul Frankston holds nothing back from the man who has done what you have done this day. I am but your steward—your manager, my dear boy, henceforward.'

'There is *one* of your possessions—the most precious, the most priceless among them,' answered Ernest, holding up his head with a do-or-die sort of air, 'and that one I now ask of you. We are past phrases with each other. But you will understand that I at least do not undervalue the worth of Antonia Frankston's heart, of your daughter's hand!'

Mr. Frankston once more paced the long-faded deck and communed with the broad and heaving deep. Then he turned. His eyes, from which the strange fire had faded wholly out, had a softened, perhaps somewhat clouded light.

‘Ernest Neuchamp,’ he said, ‘if this day has witnessed, perhaps, the most bitter insult, the deepest humiliation to which Paul Frankston has ever been subjected, it has also witnessed his greatest joy. Take her—with her old father’s blessing. You have, what he considers, earth’s greatest treasure; and it is no flattery, but honest liking, when he swears that you are worthy of her. As far as human look-out can see over life’s course, Paul Frankston’s troubles and anxieties are over. Now I can take my cigar again.’

More than one cigar was needed to allay the old man’s overstrained nervous system. Long they sat and talked, and saw the moon rise higher in the star-gemmed sky, casting a broader silver flame across the tremulous illumined deep; while between Ernest Neuchamp and the old man again stood a shadowy, diaphanous, divinely-moulded form, turning into an elysian aroma the scent of Paul’s cigars, and echoing the secret gladness of each thought, which in that hour of supernal loveliness and unutterable joy flowed from the bared heart of Ernest Neuchamp.

On the next morning Aurora in person must have attended to the proper arrangement of the dawn, the breakfast-hour, and other small matters which, apparently trivial, tend unquestionably to that due equilibrium of the nervous system, without which comfort is impossible and exhilaration hopeless.



Thus, Miss Folleton, having slept well, appeared renovated and just becomingly repentant. Antonia was severely happy, Mr. Neuchamp calmly superior to fate, and Mr. Frankston so hilarious that his daughter had to interpose more than once.

That ambrosial repast concluded, Antonia departed for town in the carriage, and straightway delivered up Miss Folleton to her rejoicing relatives, who had suffered anxiety in her absence. Hers was an impressionable, shallow nature, recovering easily from moral risks and disasters—even from physical ills. Her appetite reasserted itself; her love of life's frivolities, temporarily obscured, brightened afresh; and long before the legend of the debts, the daring, the disappearance of the Count von Schütterheims had been supplanted by newer scandal, her cheek had recovered its wonted bloom, her step its lightness in the dance, and her mien its touchingly dependent grace.

In due time she had her reward; for she captured, after a short but brilliant campaign, consisting of an oratorio, a lawn party, and three dances, an immensely opulent northern squatter. She looks fair and pure as the blue sky above her, as she rolls by, dressed *à merveille*, in the best-appointed carriage in Sydney. But for happiness—who shall say?

In the meanwhile, unlimited pleasure-seeking and universal admiration supply a reasonable substitute.

## CHAPTER XXX

MR. NEUCHAMP, having now occasional leisure to reflect, discovered that he was provided with an extensive and valuable property which he *had* partly come to Australia to seek, and with an affianced bride, whom he had not at all included among his probable possessions. As for the great project of Colonial Reform, which had stood out grandly dominating the landscape in the future of his dreams, with the solitary exception of the conversion of Jack Windsor, he could not aver that he had accomplished anything.

His co-operative community had notably failed in practice. But for the aid and counsel of Mr. Levison, it might have overthrown his own fortune, without particularly benefiting the individuals of this society.

Whenever he had acted upon his own discretion, and in furtherance of advanced views, he had been conspicuously wrong. Where he had followed the ideas of others, or been forced into them by circumstances, he had been invariably right. Where he had been generous, he had been deceived; where he had been cautious, he had found himself extravagant in loss; where he had been rash, riches had rolled in upon him with flowing tide. His most elaborate estimates of character had been

ludicrously erroneous. His advice had been inapplicable, his theories unsound. Practice—mostly blindfold—had alone given him a glimmering knowledge of the relatively component parts of this most contradictory, unintelligible antipodean world.

Mr. Neuchamp, having reached the very visible landmark of an engagement in his pilgrimage of love, was much minded to press for an immediate union, believing, now that the rain had come, there existed no rational impediments in the way of this last supreme success. Well-informed persons will know that no such outrage upon *les convenances* could for a moment be tolerated. Baffled but not despondent, he returned to the charge with such determination that the event was fixed to take place in about two months, as being the earliest hour anything so dreadful could be thought of.

So much being gained, Ernest became speedily aware that being at all hours and seasons subject to the raids of milliners' attendants and others was a state of existence out of harmony with a poet's soul. Thus, after divers unsatisfactory and interrupted interviews with Antonia, he took his passage by the mail, and heroically started for Rainbar.

This brilliant combination of business with necessity would, he thought, serve to while away the weary hours between the scorned present and the beautiful future. Rainbar and Mildool had to be visited at some time or other. Although the luxurious life of the metropolis had gained upon him, Ernest Neuchamp always arose, Antæus-like, fresh to the call of duty.

When he quitted the railway terminus and entered the mail-coach which was to convey him to his destination, the full magnitude of the mighty change of season

burst upon him. During his stay in Sydney the short, bright southern spring-time had been born and was ripening into summer, with what effect upon plant life it was now a marvel of marvels to see.

Mr. Neuchamp's novitiate had been served during the latter years of a 'dry cycle.' He had seen fair growth of pasture towards Christmas time, but of the amazing crop of grass and herbage uncared for, wasted, or burned, in what Mr. Windsor called 'an out-and-out wet season,' he had no previous experience.

From the moment that the coach cleared the forest parks which skirted the plains, Ernest found himself embarked upon a 'measureless prairie,' where the tall green grass waved far as eye could see in the summer breeze. A millennium of peace and plenty had apparently arrived for all manner of graminivorous creatures. How different was the aspect of these 'happy hunting grounds,' velvet-green of hue, flower-bespangled, brook-traversed, with the forgotten sound of falling waters ever and anon breaking on the ear, with hum of bee and carol blithe of bird, as the sleek-coated, high-conditioned coach-horses rattled the light drag merrily over the long long road! What a wondrous transformation! Would Augusta, *la belle cousine*, have believed that all this glorious natural beauty had been born, grown, and developed 'since the rain came'?

When at length the journey was over, and the proprietor of Rainbar and Mildool was deposited, with his portmanteau, at the garden gate of the former station, Mr. Neuchamp was constrained to confess that he hardly knew his own place. There had been much growth and greenery when he left with the fat cattle; but the riotous extravagance of nature in that direction could

not have been credited by him without actual eye-witness.

Around the buildings, the garden fence, the stockyard, the cowshed, was a growth of giant herbage, composed of wild oats, wild barley, marsh-mallows, clover, and fodder plants unnamed, that almost smothered these humble buildings and enclosures. A few milch cows fed lazily, looking as if they had been employed in testing the comparative merits of oilcake and Thorley's cattle-food, for an agricultural experiment. The river-flats below the house were knee-deep in clover and meadow grasses, causing Mr. Neuchamp to wonder whether or no it would be worth while to go in for a mowing-machine and a few horse-rakes, for the easy conversion of a fraction of it into a few hundred tons of meadow hay, to be stored against the next 'dry year.' The mixed grasses, as he had tested in a small way, made excellent hay. But how far off looked such a calamity! Thus ever with 'youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm' do we lightly measure the future, recking neither of stormy sky nor of the ravening deep.

After Mr. Neuchamp had sufficiently admired the grassy wilderness, thoughts arose respecting dinner, and also a feeling of wonder where everybody was. The station appeared to be minding itself. The cook was absent, though recent indications of his presence were visible in the kitchen. Charley Banks was away and Jack Windsor, probably at Mildool; also Piambook, whose open countenance and dazzling teeth would have been better than nothing. Where was Mrs. Windsor, *née* Walton? He had rather looked forward to having a talk with her under new conditions of life. She could not be at Mildool, as there was no shelter for a decent

woman there. What in the name of wonder had become of them all? There were no Indians in this country, or he might have turned his thoughts in the direction of Blackfeet or Comanches, the 'wolf Apaché and the cannibal Navajo.' Not even a Mormon settlement handy enough to organise a 'mountain-meadows massacre'! He never thought Rainbar so lonely before. He went into the cottage, and in a leisurely way unpacked his portmanteau in the snug bedroom which he had so long inhabited—where he had so often, before the rain came, lain down in sorrow and arisen in despair. What a tiny wooden box it seemed! Yet he had thought it comfortable, even luxurious. Like those of many other distinguished travelers and heroes long absent from the scene of early conflict or youthful habitation, the eyes of Mr. Neuchamp had altered their focus.

After three months' familiarity with the lodging of clubs and villas, the neat but necessarily contracted apartments of his bush cottage appeared like cupboards, or even akin to a watch-box which he had once dwelt in at Garrandilla.

However, he knew by former experience that a week or two of station life would restore his vision, his appetite, and his contentment with the district. Further than that he did not go. At the present price of cattle, it was not likely that he would need ever again to spend as many months consecutively at Rainbar as he had devoted to that desirable but isolated abode before the 'drought broke up.'

Having had ample time for comparison and appropriate reflections, he was at length set free from the apprehension that he was the sole inhabitant of Rainbar by the appearance of old Johnny, the cook, who expressed

great delight and satisfaction at seeing him, and, explaining his absence by the statement that he had taken a walk of five miles down the river in order to buy a bag of potatoes from a dray loaded with those rare esculents, proceeded to place him in possession of facts.

‘Every one about the place was away mustering at Mildool,’ he said, ‘including Mr. Banks, both the black-fellows, Jack Windsor, and even Mrs. Windsor, who, finding that there was an unoccupied hut formerly belonging to a dairyman at Mildool, had joined the mustering party. He (Johnny) hadn’t had a soul to talk to for three weeks since the muster began, and was as miserable as a bandicoot.’

The old man hustled about, laid the cloth neatly, and cooked and served an inviting meal, which Ernest, after the reckless preparations supplied to coach passengers, really enjoyed. It was far into the night when the sound of horses’ hoofs was heard, and Mr. Banks, carrying his saddle and bridle, which he placed upon the verandah, let go his courser to graze at ease, entered the spare bedroom, undressed, and was in bed and asleep all in the space of about two minutes and a half, as it seemed to Mr. Neuchamp, from the first sound of his arrival. He did not care to make himself known to the wearied youngster, and reserved that sensation, very wisely, as might be many other pieces of news and matters of business, until morning light.

With the new day arising, the active youth was much astonished, and even more gratified, to find his employer again under the same roof. At the daylight breakfast of the bush—*de rigueur* when unusual work of any kind is going forward—he favoured Ernest with a full recital of all the exciting news.



‘ Everything was well as could possibly be. All the cattle at Rainbar were fat as pigs—all the “circle dot” cattle, all Freemans’ lot, which had really turned out a famous bargain. A dealer from Ballarat had been up a week since, and to him he had sold the whole of the Freeman horses at fifteen pounds a head, cash, young and old. He didn’t think, when old Cottonbush put the brand on them, that they’d ever see a ten-pound note for the whole boiling. He had the dealer’s cheque—a good one too, or he wouldn’t have taken it—for twelve hundred and fifteen pounds! There were just eighty-one head.

‘ As for the back country, it looked lovely. Grass and water everywhere. The Back Lake was full; the river was bank high, and if there was a flood—a regular big one—he wouldn’t say but what the water might flow into the canal after all and fill the Outer Lake. By the way, there were some back blocks for sale at the back of Rainbar and Mildool, and if he had his way they should be bought, as it would give them the command of all the back country as far as Barra Creek, and keep other people from coming in by and by, and perhaps giving trouble; nothing like securing all your back country while it is cheap.

‘ With regard to Mildool, it was the best bargain he (Charley Banks) had ever seen. All unbranded stock were to be given in, and there would be calves and yearlings enough to brand to pay two years’ wages to every man employed on both runs. They had pretty well got through the count; there would be a two or three hundred head over the muster number, which would be no harm, and it was only ordinary store price for half fat cattle broken in to the run. As to fat stock, you might go on to any camp and cut out with your eyes shut; you

couldn't go wrong; they were all fat together, young and old. Mooney, the dealer, stayed a night last week, and said he would give seven pounds all round for a thousand head, half cows, to be taken in three months. He thought it was a fair offer. It saved all the bother of sending men on the roads, and when you let the mob out of your yard you get your cheque, or draft, as the case might be. He was always for selling on the run, as long as the buyers were known men.'

'How was Mrs. Windsor?'

'Oh, she was a brick—a regular trump—something like a woman! When she found Jack would only come back from Mildool once a week, she inquired whether there was any sort of a hut that could hold a small family at Mildool; was told there was the old dairy-man's hut at Green Bend, about a mile from the station. So she said she would rather live in a packing-case than be separated from her husband; and as Mildool was to be their home, they might as well go there at once. The end of it was that she made Jack take her traps over, and she has got the old place so neat and comfortable that any one might live there, small as it is, and enjoy life. She was a downright sensible woman, as well as a deuced good-looking one, and she would make Jack a rich man before he died.'

'Was there anything else to tell?'

'Well, not much. He was going to let Jack have Boinmaroo at Mildool, and keep Piambook here; when they mustered at either place they could join forces. Oh! the Freemans. Well, they had all gone a month back. Joe and Bill had gone to take up more land in the Albury district. Wish them joy wherever they go. We're quit of them, that's one comfort. Abraham Free-

man and his lot cleared out for his old place at Bowning. They'll do well there in a quiet way. Poor Tottie was sorry to leave Rainbar, and cried like fun. Had to comfort her a bit when the old woman wasn't looking. It's a beastly nuisance having other people's stock on your run, and other people's boys galloping about all over the country, whether you like it or not. Was deuced glad to see their teams yoked and their furniture on, I can tell you. Suppose you'd like to ride over to Mildool, now you are here?'

Mr. Neuchamp thought he might as well, although fully satisfied that the muster would have been satisfactorily completed without him. So the two men rode over that day and had a look at the humours of a delivery muster.

There was, as usual, great skirmishing about the ownership of calves temporarily separated from their maternal parents, one stockman averring that he remembered every spot on a certain calf's hide since its early infancy, others corroborating his assertion that it 'belonged to,' or was the progeny of, his old black 'triangle-bar' cow; Mr. Windsor, as counsel for the Crown, declaring, on the other hand, that no calf should leave the Mildool run unless provided with a manifest mother, then and there substantiating her claim to maternity by such personal attentions or privileges as could not be fabricated or misunderstood. To him the adverse stockman would remark that, if he was going to talk like that, he might stick to every blessed clear-skin on the river. Mr. Windsor retorting that he doesn't say for that, but if people think they can collar calves for the asking, they've come to the wrong shop when they ride to Mildool muster. And so on, and so on.

Nathless, in course of time all things are arranged, in some shape, with or without a proportionate allowance of growling, as the men say. It being apparent that Mr. Windsor, now full-fledged overseer of Mildool, knows a thing or two, and will stand up stoutly for his master's rights, fewer encroachments are, let us suppose, attempted.

The cattle are counted and finally gathered, and are discovered to exceed, by three hundred odd, the station number. The former manager feels complimented that he has been able to muster beyond his books. The purchaser is satisfied, as the additional cattle are merely charged to him at store cattle price, and, being 'to the manor born,' will swiftly 'grow into money.' The strange stockmen depart, carrying with them a large mixed drove of strayed cattle. The ex-overseer pays his men and then leaves for down the country, there to wait on the agents, and receive his *cong  * or further employment, as the case may be. Charley Banks and the black boys, Jack Windsor, and Mr. Neuchamp are left in undisputed possession of the new kingdom.

With such a season, with such prices ruling, the management is the merest routine work, a few hundred calves to brand, arrangements to make for an early muster to show the herd to the great cattle-dealer, who wants to buy a thousand head fat to be taken away in three months, and paid for by his acceptance at that date. Mr. Mooney happens to come before Ernest leaves for Sydney, and the negotiation being successful, the new proprietor of Mildool sets out for the metropolis with a negotiable bill in his pocket for seven thousand pounds—more than a third of the purchase-money of the run.

While Mr. Neuchamp was possessing his soul in tran-

quillity at Rainbar, he was surprised at receiving a letter from his erstwhile Turonia comrade, Mr. Bright. That cheerful financier wrote as follows :

TURONIA, 10th December 18—.

MY DEAR NEUCHAMP—I hear you are to be married to the nicest girl in Sydney. I thought it only reasonable, considering our two or three larks here, to offer my congratulations ; and, by the bye, talking of things happening, that fellow Greffham, whom you remember my helping to arrest, was hanged last Wednesday at Medhurst.

The evidence, joined to his paying away the numbered notes, known to be in the escort parcel, was awfully strong against him. He made no confession, and was as cool and unconcerned to the very last, as you and I ever saw him at the billiard-table. What a wonderful uphill game he could play ! It is just possible he might have got off ; but Merlin fished up additional evidence which fixed him, in the eyes of the jury, I think—the groom at the inn, who swore he saw a small parcel covered with a gray rug on his saddle, as he returned from the direction of Running Creek, which he had not when he passed up. You ought to have seen him and Merlin look at each other when Merlin asked the Crown prosecutor to have Carl Anderson called. It was a ‘duel with eyes.’ But, even without that, I don’t see how he could have accounted for the notes.

I happened to be in Medhurst the day he was to be turned off. I received a message that he wanted to see me, so I went to the gaol. I knew the sheriff well. They showed me into his cell at once.

When I got in, Greffham nearly had finished dressing, and had only to put on his frock-coat to be better turned out, if possible, than he was for the lawn party Branksome gave when the Governor came up. He happened to be cleaning his teeth—you remember how white and even they were—as I came through the door.

‘Sit down, old man,’ he said, just as usual, shying his tooth-brush into the corner of the cell. ‘I daresay they’ll do ; and I suppose I shan’t want *that* any more. What should you say ? ’Pon my soul, there isn’t a chair to offer you ; devilish close about furniture, aren’t they now ? But it’s very kind of you, Bright, to come and see a fellow, when he’s—well—peculiarly situated, eh ?’

Here he laughed quite naturally, I give you my word—not forced

at all. He certainly *was* the coolest hand I ever saw ; and he died as he lived.

‘What I wanted to see you for, Bright, was this’—here his voice shook and he *did* appear to show a little feeling—‘you’ll take these two letters for me, like a good fellow ; one I want you to send to —— after I am gone ; the other you can open *then*. Make what use you like of the contents. I shan’t care then ; say nothing *now* to gratify curiosity. As to what I may have done, or not done, I hold myself the best judge of my reasons. You know what my life has been. Open and straightforward, if somewhat reckless. My cards have always been on the table. I have risked all that man holds dear on a throw before. This time I have lost. I pay the stakes ; there is no more to be said. Lionel Greffham is not the man to say “I repent.” He is what he is, and will die as he has lived. My time on earth has not been spun out much, but, measured by enjoyment, with a front seat mostly at life’s opera, it adds up fairly. Give me a Havannah from your case. You will see me pretty “fit” for the stage when they ring in the leading performer. By the way, I told them to give you my revolver ; and while I think of it, just remember this, if you want to make *very close shooting* at any time, only put in three parts of the powder in the cartridge.’

I really believe these were his last words, except to the —— hangman.

He finished his cigar, and lounged up to the gallows, where he died in the face of a tremendous crowd, calmly and scornfully, just as he was accustomed to bear himself to them in life. Jack Ketch was a new hand, and nervous. I heard Greffham say, just as if he was rowing a fellow for awkwardness in saddling his horse, ‘You clumsy idiot, what are you trembling for ? Hang me, if I can see what there is to make a fuss about ! I’ll bet you a pound I tuck you up in ten minutes without any baggling. *Now*, you’re right. Am *I* standing quite square ?’

‘You’re all right, sir,’ the man said respectfully. The drop fell, and poor Greffham (I can’t help saying it, although he was a precious scoundrel) died without the least contrition. Showed perfectly good taste to the last. Deuced rum people one meets on a goldfield, don’t you, now ?

I suppose you’re not likely to come this way again. We’re not quite so jolly as we were. The Colonel has gone back to India. Old De Bracy has got a good Government appointment, for which he looks more suited than market-gardening, though he was hard to



beat at that, or anything he tackled. I hear you've made pots of money. Parklands was here the other day, and told me. I have a deuced good mind to turn squatter myself. My regards to old Frankston, and ask him if he remembers the last story I told him. Ha, ha!—Yours sincerely,

JOHN WILDER BRIGHT.

Now the great muster and delivery at Mildool was over and everyday life at Rainbar had again to be faced, Ernest began to feel like one Alexander, sometimes called Great, who had conquered his way into the kingdom of Ennui. He was the possessor of a fortune and of a bride, both above his utmost hopes, his loftiest aspirations; but he began to fear that he had lost that which leaves life very destitute of savour—he feared with a new and terrible dread that he had lost his Occupation!

For life seemed so much more easy, so much less necessary to take thought about, now that he had two stations than when he had but one—one likely to be wrested from him. So is it that Difficulty is oft our friend in disguise, Success but the veiled foe which smiles at our faltering footsteps and watches to destroy. He saw now, that with Jack Windsor at Mildool, and Charley Banks, alert, energetic, fully experienced, at Rainbar, his life henceforth would be that of a visitor, a supernumerary—unless indeed he employed his mind in the construction and organisation of ‘improvements’! Ha, ha! ‘*Vade retro, Sathanas!*’ The Genie was safe immured in his brazen sealed-up vessel. There should he remain.

Still was there one ‘improvement’ in which he had never altogether lost faith, long and dispiriting as had been the divorce between formation and utility. This was the cutting the connecting channel between the Back Lake and the ‘Outer Lake.’ Long had the ‘master’s



ditch' been as useless as a fish-pond in the bosom of the Sahara, as a rose-garden in a glacier, as an oyster-bed in a steppe. Cattle had walked over it; grass had grown in it; stockmen and thoughtless souls had jeered at it, and at the English stranger who had thrown away upon its construction the money of which he possessed a quantity so greatly in excess of his apparent intelligence. As long as he remained the proprietor of the run, it would be hardly in keeping with the manner of the bush to call it 'Neuchamp's Folly.' But had failure or absence chanced to occur in his case, the satirical nomenclature would not have been deferred for a week. In the solitary rides and musings to which, in default of daily work and labour, Mr. Neuchamp was fain to betake himself, it chanced that he had repeatedly examined that portion of this great sheet of water, which rang with the whistling wings of wild fowl, and on breezy days surged with long rippling waves against its bank.

While in Sydney a number of back blocks, at no greater distance from this outer lake than it was from the former 'frontage,' had been put under offer to him. What if he should accept the terms—the price was low—and trust to the chance of the next great flood in the full-fed chafing river sending the water leaping down his tiny canal, and thus giving a value never before dreamed of to this splendidly grand but unnatural region. In spite of his half-settled determination to accept no other speculative risks, but, like a wise man, to rest contented with proved success, the next post conveyed instructions to Messrs. Paul Frankston and Co. to close for all the blocks, each five miles square, from A to M, comprising all the unoccupied country at the back of Rainbar and Mildool, at the price named.

On the following morning the weather was misty and unusually cloudy, with an apparent tendency to rain. No rain fell, however; but the raw air, the unusual bleakness of the atmosphere, seemed abnormal to Ernest Neuchamp.

‘I should not wonder,’ said Mr. Banks, in explanation, ‘that it was raining cats and dogs somewhere else, snowing, or something of that sort. Perhaps at the head of the river. If that’s the case, we shall have a flood and no mistake. Such a one as none of us has seen yet. However, we’ve neither hoof nor horn nor fleece on the frontage. It can’t hurt us, that’s one comfort.’

Mr. Banks’s prognostications were correct. Within three days—

. . . like a horse unbroken,  
When first he feels the rein,  
The furious river struggled hard,  
And tossed his tawny mane,  
And burst the curb and bounded,  
Rejoicing to be free,  
And whirling down in fierce career  
Battlement and plank and pier,  
Rushed headlong to the sea.

Battlement and plank and pier were in this case represented by hut slabs and rafters, haystacks and pumpkins, from the arable lands and meadows through which the great river held its upper course; while drowned stock and the posts and rails of many a mile of submerged fencing represented the latter floating trifles. There was much that was grand in the steadily deepening, broadening tide which slowly and remorselessly crawled over the wide green flats, which undermined the great waterworn precipices of the red-clayed bluffs, bringing down enormous fragments and masses, many tons in

weight, which fell, foamed, and disappeared in the turbid, hurrying wave. Who could have recognised in this fierce, swollen, tyrant river, yellow as the Tiber, broad as the Danube, resistless as Ocean, the shallow, pellucid streamlet, rippling over its sandy shallows, of the dead, bygone famine year?

On the larger flats it was miles wide. The white, straight tree-trunks stood like colonnades with arches framed in foliage, disappearing in endless perspective above a limitless plain of gliding waters.

By night, as Mr. Neuchamp awoke in his cottage, which was built upon an elevation said by tradition to be above the reach of floods, the 'remorseless dash of billows' sounded distinctly, unpleasantly close in the darkness.

On the following day, the flood still continuing to rise, Piambook was despatched to the Back Lake to report, and upon his return stated that 'water yan along that one picaninny blind creek like it Murray, make haste longer Outer Lake.' Full of hope and expectant of triumph, Mr. Neuchamp started out for 'Lake country,' accompanied by Mr. Banks.

When they arrived at the first lake the unusual fulness and volume of the water in that reservoir showed that the main stream must have been forced outwards along the course of the ancient, natural channel, by which in years of exceptional high floods—and in those years only—the lake had been filled.

Now, thought Mr. Neuchamp, the hour, long delayed, long doubted, has surely come. Who could have dreamed but a few short months since, when our very souls were adust and athirst with perennial famine, that our eyes should behold the sight which I see now? How should

it teach us to hoard the garnered gold of truth, the 'eternal verity' in our heart of hearts! 'My lord delayeth his coming.' Was that held to be a reason, an excuse for the unfaithful, self-indulgent? Truly this would seem to some as great a miracle as the leaping water which followed the stroke of the prophet's staff in that other desert of which we read of old.

And now his eyes did actually behold the first trickling, wondrous motion of the brimming reservoir to advance, gravitation-led, along the narrow path to its far-distant sister lake. Slowly the full waters rose to the very lip of the vast natural cup or vase, and then, first saturating the entrance, poured down the narrow outlet which the forecasting mind of man had prepared for it. It trickled, it flowed, it ran, it coursed, foaming and rushing, along the cutting, of which the fall at first exceeded that of the general passage. It was done! It was over! A proud success!

Charley Banks threw up his hat. Together they rode recklessly onward to the Outer Lake, and there Ernest Neuchamp enjoyed silently the deep satisfaction—then known but to the projector and inventor—of witnessing the waters of the Inner Lake, for the first time since the sea had ceased to murmur over these boundless levels, flow fast and flashing forward, driven by the pressure of the immense body behind, into the vast, deep, grass-clothed basin of the Outer Lake.

This was a triumph truly. For this alone it was worth while to have journeyed across the long long ocean tide, to have toiled and suffered, waited and watched, to have eaten his heart with fear and sickening dread of the gaunt destroyer 'Ruin,' ever stalking nearer and nearer. This was true life—real adventure

—the hazard and the triumph which alone constitute true manhood.

In the ecstasy of the moment Ernest Neuchamp forgot the fortune he had gained, the bride whom he had won, the home of his youth, the grand and glorious future, the not uneventful past. All things seemed as dreams and visions by the side of this grand and living Reality.

As he sat on his horse and gazed, still flowed the glorious wave into the century-dry basin by the channel which he, Ernest Neuchamp, had, in defiance of Nature, opinion, and society, conceived, formed, and successfully completed. Seasons might come and go; another dry time might come; the water might periodically evaporate and disappear,—but nothing could evade the great fact henceforth in the history of the land, that he had established the connection between the river and this distant, long-dry, unthought-of reservoir. There would be no more hint or menace of Neuchamp's Folly—more likely, Neuchamp's River.

Lake Neuchamp! Pshaw! it was an inland sea. Why not name it now? Why not render immortal, not his own perhaps ancient patronymic, but the lovely and beloved name of his soul's divinity? Now was the hour, the minute, when the virgin waters were falling for the first time in creation into the flower-besprinkled lap of the green earth before their eyes!

'Charley, my boy,' he said to Mr. Banks, 'take off your hat. Piambook, do liket me,' he said, removing his own. 'I name this water, now about to be filled for the first time within the memory of man, "Lake Antonia." So mote it be. Hip, hip, hurrah!' and the echoes of the waste rang to the unfamiliar sounds of the great British shout of welcome, of salutation, of battle-joy, of death-

defiance, which England's friends and England's foes have had ere now just cause to know.

'Hurrah!' joined in Charley Banks with genuine feeling. 'By George! I never thought to see this sight—last year particularly; but, of course, we might have known it wasn't going to be dry always, as Levison said. We don't see far beyond our noses, most of us. But it *was* hard to conjure up any notion of a regular out-and-out waterfall like this with a twelvemonth's dust, and last year's burnt feed keeping as black as the day it took fire. I believe there will be thirty feet of water in this when it's full up, and it soon will be at this rate.'

'Budgerees tumble down water that one,' said Piam-book. 'Old man blackfellow yabber, debil-debil, make a light here when he yan long that one scrub.'

Another occasion of congratulation awaited Mr. Neuchamp, the pleasure and pride accompanying which were perhaps only second in degree to the feelings inspired by the engineering triumph of Lake Antonia. His stud of Austral-Arabian horses had shared in the general advance and development of the property; they were now a perfect marvel of successful rearing.

He had them brought in daily from the sandhills near the plain where they ordinarily grazed, and passed hours in reviewing the colts and fillies, the yearlings, the mares and the foals. Every grade and stage, from the equine baby which gambolled and frisked by the side of its dam, to the well-furnished three-year-old filly—'Velut in latis equa trima campis ludit exsultim, metuitque tangi,'—all were satin-coated, sleek and round, fuller-fleshed, stronger, swifter; more riotously healthy could they not have been had they been fed with golden oats in an emperor's stable. Daintily now they picked the half-ripened tops from the



fields of wild oats or barley which spread for leagues around. They drank of the pure clear waters of every pool and brooklet. They lay at night in the thickly-carpeted sandy knolls, and snuffed up the free desert breeze, fresh wafted from inmost sands or farthest seas. Partaking on one side of their parentage of the stately height and generous scope of their southern dams, culled from the noble race of island steeds which bear up the large frames of the modern Anglo-Saxon, they inherited a strong, perhaps overpowering infusion of the priceless blood of the courser of the desert. Their delicate heads, their wide nostrils, their adamantine legs, their perfect symmetry, all told of the ancient lineage of Omar the Keheilan, whose dam was Najima Sabeli or the Morning Star, of the strain Seglawee Dzedran, which, as every camel-driver of the Anezeh knows, dates back to El Kamsch, that glorious equine constellation, the five mares of Mahomet!

Here, again, was another instance of what Ernest could not but acknowledge gratefully as the generosity of Fate. Had but the season continued obdurate, his utter irrevocable ruin could not have been stayed. As a consequence, this stud, so precious, so profitable, so distinguished as it was apparently destined to be (for Mr. Banks told him that numbers of offers had already been received for all available surplus stock, while the agent of a large dealer had implored him to put a price upon the whole stud), would doubtless have passed under the hammer as most unconsidered trifles, to be sneered at, scattered, for ever wasted and lost, as had been many a good fellow's pet stud ere now.

At length the day arrived when, having witnessed the satisfactory conclusion of every conceivable business duty

and task which could be transacted at Rainbar or Mildool, Mr. Neuchamp took his place in the mail for Sydney, which city he had calculated to reach within a week of the dread ceremonial which was to seal his destiny. The coach did *not* break down or capsize, fracturing Mr. Neuchamp's leg in two places. The train fulfilled its appointed task, and the stern steam-giant did not select that opportunity for running off the rails or equalising angles. Something of the sort might have been reasonably expected to happen to a hero so near the rapturous denouement of the third volume, in which, indeed, every hero of average respectability is killed, mysteriously imprisoned, or married.

Mr. Neuchamp had undergone trials and troubles, risks and anxieties, losses and crosses; but the season of tribulation was for ever past for him. He had henceforth but to submit to the compulsory laurel crown, to the caresses of Fortune's favourite delegates, to listen to the plaudits of the crowd, to withstand the whispers and glances of beauty. He was now wise, beautiful, strong, and brave, a conqueror, an Adonis—in a word, he was *rich*!

He stood successful, and the world's praises, grudgingly bestowed upon struggling fortitude, were showered upon the obviously victorious speculator. All kinds of rumours went forth about him. His possessions were multiplied, so that Rainbar and Mildool stood sponsors for a tract of country about as large as from Kashgar to Khiva.

The canal was magnified into the dimensions of its namesake of Suez, and a trade was prophesied which would overshadow Melbourne and revolutionise Adelaide. He had contracted for the remount service for the whole

Madras Presidency, such a matter being quite within the scope of his immense and high-bred studs. His herds of cattle were to supply Ballarat and Sandhurst with fat stock, and Melbourne buyers were on their way to secure everything he could deliver for the next two years! Ernest Neuchamp of Rainbar was the man of the day; the popular idol. Squatter though he might be, some of Jack Windsor's grateful utterances had been circulated, and a democratic but strongly appreciative and generous populace adored him. Portraits of Mr. Neuchamp and his faithful retainer, Jack Windsor, contending victoriously with a swarthy piratical crowd, led on by 'the Count with a cutlass and a belt full of revolvers, appeared in the windows of the print-shops. Heroism and unselfish generosity, like murder, 'will out.'

Whether accidentally or otherwise, the Morahmee conflict had transpired. I make no reflections upon the well-known inviolable secrecy which shrouds all post-nuptial communications. I content myself with stating a fact. Mr. Windsor was now a married man.

Ernest was at first annoyed, then surprised, lastly, unaffectedly amused, when a highly popular dramatic version of the incident appeared at the Victoria Theatre, wherein he was represented as defying the Count, and assuring him that 'berlood should flow from Morahmee Jetty to the South Head Lighthouse ere he relinquished the two maidens to his lawless grasp,' while Jack Windsor's representative, with a cabbage-tree hat and a hanging velvet band broad enough to make a sash for Carry, placed himself in an exaggerated, pugilistic attitude, and implored the foreign seamen to 'come on and confront on his own ground, by the shore of that harbour which was his country's pride, a true-born Sydney native!'

This brought down the house, and occasioned Mr. Neuchamp such anguish of mind that he began to think Jermyn Croker not such a bad fellow after all, and to feel unkindly towards the great land and the warm-hearted people of his adoption.

Incapable of being stimulated by flattery into a false estimate of himself, these exaggerated symptoms of appreciation but pained him acutely; they disturbed his philosophical mind, ever craving for the performance of justice and intolerant of all lower standards of right.

As for Antonia Frankston, like most women, she was gratified by these tokens of the distinction which had been so profusely accorded to her hero. He was a hero who, in her eyes, though worthy of triumphs and processions, evaded his claims to such distinctions. He was too prone, she thought, to be over Scriptural in his social habitudes, and unless roused and incited, to take the lower rather than the higher seat at the board. Now that the people, wavering and impulsive, but still a mighty and tangible power, had endorsed and adopted him, Antonia's expansive mind recognised the brevet rank bestowed upon him. After all, had he not done much and dared greatly? Was it not well for the world to know it? If he was to be decorated, few deserved it more. So Antonia accepted serenely and in good faith the plaudits and universal flattery which now commenced to be showered upon the hero of her choice, the idol of her heart, the image of all written manhood.

The days which Mr. Neuchamp spent in Sydney after his return from Mildool and Rainbar were certainly more tedious than any which he had ever known in the pleasant city; but at length they passed away and were no more—strange thought! those atoms from the mighty mass

of Time—drops from his flowing river—draughts, alas! quaffed or spilled from life's golden chalice. They were past, faded, dead, irrevocably gone, as the days of the years before Pharaoh, before the shepherd kings, before the dawn of human life, Eden, or the first gleam of light which flashed upon a darkened, formless world!

Sad, pathetic even, is the death of a day! Its circling hours have known peace, joy, loving regard, social glee, charity, justice, mercy, repose. The allotted task has been done. The parent's smile, the wife's love, the babe's prattle, have all glorified earth during its short season. And now the day is done! its tiny term is over, lost in the shoreless sea of past immensities! The brightly inconstant orb shines tenderly on the new-born stranger, full of joyous hope or dread expectancy. Who can tell what this, the new and garish day, may bring forth? Let us weep for the loved, fast-fading Child of Time, in whose golden tresses, at least, twined no cypress wreath.

Then, heralded by calm and cloudless hours, did the wondrous unit, the Day of Days, dawn for Ernest Neuchamp. Rarely—even in that matchless clime, where the too ardent sun alone may be blamed by the husbandman, rarely by the citizen or the tourist—did a more perfect, unrivalled, wondrous day steal rosy through the ocean mists, the folded vapours, to change into fretted gold and Tyrian dyes the tender tints of flushed dawn. All nature visibly, audibly rejoiced. The tiny wavelets murmured on the milk-white sands of the Morahmee beach, that their darling—she who loved them and talked with them in many a hushed eve, in many a solemn starry midnight—was this day to be wed. The strange foreign pines and flower trees of the Morahmee plantation, brought from many a distant land to please the

lady of the mansion, echoed the sound as they waved to and fro with oriental languor and tropical mystery. The flowerets she daily tended turned imperceptibly their delicately various sheen of petals to each other and sighed the tender secret. With how many secrets are not the flowers entrusted? Have they not been sworn to silence since those days of the great dead empires, when the vows and pleadings, songs and laughter, beneath the rose-chaplets were sacred evermore?

Her gems, of which Antonia had great store—for there was more difficulty in preventing Paul from overlading her caskets than of replenishing them—even they knew it. They flashed and glittered, and reddened, and sent out green and purple light, for they are envious, hard, and remorseless of nature, as they noted the arrival of a bediamonded necklace, and a brooch outshining in splendour any of their rich and rare and very exclusive ‘set.’

The pensioners, her dependants, of the house, among the humble, and the very poor, knew it and raised for her welfare the brief unstudied prayer which comes from a thankful heart. The poor, in ordinary acceptance, are, and have always been, in Australia, difficult to discover and to distinguish. But to the earnest quest of the unaffectedly charitable, anxious to do good to soul or body, to succour the tempted, to help the needy, to save him that is ready to perish, worthy occasions of ministration have never been absent from the outskirts of every large city.

The forlorn spinster, friendless and forsaken, the overworked matron,—the shabby genteel sufferers too secure to starve, too poor to enjoy, too proud to complain, and, occasionally, what seemed to be an example of un-



merciful disaster,—among these were the rich maiden's unobtrusive but unremittingly performed good works, of which none heard, none knew, but the recipients, and perhaps the discreetest of co-workers.

And thus, with the day just dawned, had the maiden life of Antonia Frankston come to an end. From this day forth her being was to merge in that of one who, falling with the suddenness of a shipwrecked mariner into their society, had been, as would have been such a waif, treated with every friendly office, with the ample up-springing kindness of a princely heart, by her fond father. That father, no mean judge of his fellow-man, had seen in his early career but the noble errors of a lofty nature and an elevated ideal. Such disproportions between judgment and experience but prove the natural dignity of the mind as fully as the precocious wisdom of the gutter-bred urchin waif, his base descent and companionship.

Paul Frankston had long foreseen that, when the lessons of life should have cleared the encrustation from the character of his *protégé*, it would shine forth bright and burnished as Toledo steel—all-sufficient for defence, nay, equal to spirited attack, should such need arise. He saw that the future possessor and guardian of his soul's treasure was a 'man' as well as a 'gentleman.' On both of these essentials he laid great weight. For the rest, his principles were high and unfaltering, his habits unimpeachable. Whatever trifling defects there might be in his character were merely such as were incident to mortality. They must be left to the influence of time, experience, and of Antonia.

'If she doesn't turn him out a perfect article,' said

Paul, unconsciously quitting the mental for the actual soliloquy, 'why, nothing and no one can. If I had been any one else, and she had commenced early enough at me, I really believe that she'd have changed old Paul Frankston into a bishop, or, at any rate, a rural dean at least; even Charley Carryall——'

But whether Captain Carryall's utterances and anecdotes were scarcely of a nature calculated to harmonise with bishops and deans, or whether Mr. Frankston's many engagements at this important crisis suddenly engaged his attention, can never be known with that precision which this chronicler is always anxious to supply. One thing only is certain, that he looked at his watch, and hastily arising from his arm-chair, departed into the city.

For the information of a section of readers for whom we feel much respect and gratitude, it may be mentioned that the wedding took place at St. James's, a venerable but architecturally imperfect pile in the vicinity of Hyde Park. There be churches near Morahmee more replete with 'miserable sinners' in robes of Worth and garments of Poole, but Mr. Frankston would none of them. In the old church had he stood beside his mother, a school-boy, wondering and wearied, but acquiescent, after the manner of British children; in the old church had he plighted his troth to Antonia's sainted mother; in the old church should his darling utter her vows, and in no other. Are there any words which can fitly interpret the deep joy and endless thankfulness which fill the heart and humble the mind of him who, all unworthy, knows that the chalice of life's deepest joy is even then past all risk and danger, steadily uplifted to his reverent lips?

Doubts there have been, delays that fretted, fears that shook the soul, clouds that dimmed, darkness that hid the sky of love. All these have sped. Here is naught but the glad and gracious Present, that blue and golden day which, pardoning and giving amnesty to the Past, beseeches, well-nigh assures, the stern veiled form of the Future.

Some of these reflections would doubtless have mingled with the contemplations of Ernest Neuchamp at Aurora's summons on that glad morn but for an unimportant fact—that he was at that well-known poetical period most soundly asleep.

Restlessly wakeful during the earlier night-watches, he slept heavily at length, and only awoke, terrible to relate, with barely time for a careful toilet. Hastily disposing of a cup of coffee and a roll, he betook himself, in company with Mr. Parklands, who, I grieve to relate, had been playing loo all night, and was equally late and guilty, to the ancient church, where they were, by the good fortune of Parklands' watch being rather fast—like all his movements—exactly, accurately the canonical five minutes before the time. Both of the important personages, being secretly troubled, looked slightly, becomingly pale. But the pallor of Parklands, entirely due to an unprosperous week, involving heavier disbursements and later sittings than ordinary, told much in his favour with the bridesmaids, so much so, that he always averred, in his customary irreverent speech, that 'his flint was fixed' on the occasion.

Probably owing to the calmly superior aspect of Mr. Hartley Selmore, or the tonic supplied by Jermyn Croker's patent disapprobation and contempt of the whole proceedings, the protagonist and his acolouthos

went through the ordeal with that exact proportion of courage, reverence, deftness, and satisfaction, the full rendering of which is often hard upon him who makes necessarily 'a first appearance.' As for Antonia's loveliness on that day, when, radiant, white-robed, and serene, she placed her hand in that of her lover, and greeted him with the trustful smile in which the virgin-soul shines out o'er the maiden-bride's countenance, Ernest Neuchamp may be pardoned for thinking that the angel of his dreams had been permitted to visit the earth, to rehearse for his especial joy a premature beatific vision.

Mr. Parklands effected a sensation by dropping the bridal-ring, but as he displayed much quickness of eye and manual dexterity in regaining it, the incident had rather a beneficial effect than otherwise. Everything was happily concluded, even to the kissing of the bridesmaids, Mr. Parklands, with his usual energy and daring, having insisted on carrying out personally that pleasing portion of the programme, supposed to appertain of right to the holder of the ancient and honourable office of groomsman. This compelled the chasing of two unwilling damsels half-way down the aisle, after which the slightly scandalised spectators quitted the church, while the wedding-guests betook themselves to Morahmee.

There, as they arrived, Mr. Frankston, sweeping the bay mechanically with long-practised eye, exclaimed, 'What boat is that heading for our jetty at such a pace? —a whaleboat, too, with a Kanaka crew. There's a tall man with the steer oar in his fist; by Jove! it's Charley Carryall for a thousand.'

And that cheerful mariner and successful narrator it proved to be when the weather-beaten boat came foaming up to the little pier, drawn half out of the water by her

wild-looking, long-haired crew, encouraged by their captain, who was backing up the stroke as if an eighty-barrel whale depended upon their speed.

‘Frantically glad to see you, Charley, my boy,’ shouted Paul; ‘never hoped for such luck; the only man necessary to make the affair perfect—absolutely perfect. Isn’t he, Antonia? But how did you guess what we were about, and yet here in time? I see the old *Banksia* is only creeping up the harbour now.’

‘*That* guided me,’ said the Captain, pointing to the profusely decorated Morahmee flagstaff—an invariable adjunct to a marine villa. ‘I was sure all that bunting wasn’t up for anything short of Antonia’s wedding. So I dressed and came away. The operculums I was bringing our little girl here will just come in appropriately. They’re the first any of you have seen, I daresay.’

The faintly subdued tone which is usual and natural in the pre-banquet stage could not be reasonably protracted after the first fusilade of Paul’s wonderful Pommeroy and Veuve Clicquot, Steinberger and Roederer.

The guests were many and joyous, the day brilliant, the occasion fortunate and mirth-inspiring, the entertainment unparalleled, and henceforth proverbial in a city of sumptuous and lavish hospitality.

Small wonder, then, that the merriment was as free and unconstrained as the welcome was cordial, and the banquet regal in its costly profusion. How the jests circulated! how the silvery laughter rang! how the bright eyes sparkled! how the fair cheeks glowed! how the soft breeze whispered love! how the blue wave murmured joy!

Did not Mr. Selmore propose the health of the bride and bridegroom with such pathetic eloquence that the

uninstructed were doubtful as to whether he was Antonia's uncle or Mr. Neuchamp's father? He referred to the mingled energy, foresight, acuteness, and originality displayed by his valued, and, he might add, distinguished friend Ernest Neuchamp. By utilising qualities of the highest order, joined with information always yielded, he was proud to say, by himself and other pioneers, he had achieved an unequalled, but, he must add, a most deserved success, which placed him in the front rank of the pastoral proprietors of New South Wales.

Any one would have imagined from Mr. Hartley Selmore's benevolent flow of eulogy that he had carefully nursed the infancy of Mr. Neuchamp's fortunes instead of ruthlessly endeavouring to strangle the tender nursling. He himself, by means of luck and much discount, had managed to hang on, ostensible proprietor of his numerous stations, until the tide turned. Now he was a wealthy man, and needed not to call the governor of the Bank of England his cousin.

With prosperity his character and estimation had much improved. There were those yet who said he was an unprincipled remorseless old humbug, and would none of him. But in a general way he was acceptable; popular, in private and in public. His natural talents were great; his acquirements above the average; his manner irresistible; it was no one's particular interest or business to bring him to book,—so he dined and played billiards at the clubs, buttonholed officials, and greeted illustrious strangers, as if the greater portion of the pastoral interior of Australia belonged to him, or as though he were one of the Conscript Fathers, distinguished for an excess of Roman virtues, of this rising nation.

Mr. Parklands indeed desired to throw some missile



at him for his 'cheek,' as he confided to a young lady with sensational blue eyes, but desisted from that practical criticism upon being implored by his fair neighbour not to think of it, for her sake, and that of the ladies generally. The speaker was pretty enough to speak with authority, and so Hartley, like other fortunate conspirators and oppressors, departed in triumph, with the plaudits and congratulations of the unthinking public. For the rest, the affair went off much as such society fireworks do. Augusta Newchamp, in a Paris dress, looked so extremely well that Jermyn Croker congratulated himself warmly, and mingled such vitriolic scintillations with his pleasantries, that every one was awed into admiration. The mail steamer was to sail in a few days, and he flattered himself that he had contrived a surprise for all his friends, which should contain an element of ignoring contempt so complete in conception and execution, that his departure from the colony should faithfully reflect the opinions and convictions formed during his residence in it.

Having, after considerable hesitation, finally determined to enter upon the frightfully uncertain adventure of matrimony, he had offered himself and heart, such as it was, in marriage to Miss Augusta, with many apologies for the apparent necessity of the ceremony being performed in a colony. That young lady had endeared herself to Mr. Croker by her unsparing criticisms, by her ceaseless discontent with all things Australian, by her unmistakable air of *ton* and distinction. He did not entirely overlook her possession of a moderate but assured income.

With his customary disregard for the feelings of others, he had insisted upon being married, without the usual time-honoured ceremonies and concomitants, on the

morning upon which the mail steamer started for Europe. By going on board directly afterwards, the Sydney people would be precluded from hearing of the event until after their departure; while their fellow-passengers, most of them strangers, would be ignorant as to whether the newly-married couple were of a week's date or of six months.

This arrangement, in which he had no great difficulty in persuading Miss Augusta to acquiesce, would have excellently answered Mr. Croker's unselfish expectations but for one circumstance, which he doubtless noted to the debit of colonial wrongs and shortcomings—he had neglected to procure the co-operation of the elements.

No sooner had the ceremony, unwitnessed save by Paul Frankston and Mr. and Mrs. Neuchamp, taken place, and the happy pair been transferred to the *Nubia*, their luggage having been safely deposited in that magnificent ocean steamer days before,—no sooner had the great steamer neared the limit of the harbour, when a southerly gale, an absolute hurricane, broke upon the coast with such almost unprecedented fury that till it abated no sane commander of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's service would have dreamed of quitting safe anchorage.

For three days the 'tempest howled and wailed,' and most uncomfortably the *Nubia* lay at anchor, safe but most uneasy, and, as she was rather crank, rolling and pitching nearly as wildly as she could have done in the open sea.

It so chanced that one of Mr. Croker's few weak points was an extraordinarily extreme susceptibility to *mal de mer*. On all occasions upon which he had cleared the Heads, for years past, he had suffered terribly. But

never since his first outward-bound experience in early life had he suffered torments, prostration, akin to this. He lay in his cabin death-like, despairing, well-nigh in collapse.

Miss Neuchamp, in spite of her much travelling, was always a martyr during the first week of a voyage, if the weather chanced to be bad. Now it certainly was bad, very bad; and in consequence Miss Augusta lay, under the charge of a stewardess, in a stern cabin, well-nigh sick unto death, heedless of life and its chequered presentments, and as oblivious, not to say indifferent, to the fate of Jermyn Croker as if she had yesterday sworn to love and obey the chief officer of the *Nubia*.

This was temporary anguish, mordant and keen, doubtless. But Time, the healer, would certainly in a few days have set it straight. The fact of an unknown lady and gentleman being indisposed at the commencement of the voyage afflicts nobody. But here was apparently the finger of the fiend. A ruffianly pilot, coming off in his hardy yawl, brought on board a copy of the *Sydney Morning Herald* of the day following their attempted departure, in which it was duly set forth how, at St. James's Church, by Canon Druid, Jermyn, second son of Crusty Croker, Esq., of Crankleye Hall, Cornwall, was then and there married to Augusta, only daughter of the Rev. Cyril Neuchamp, incumbent of Neuchamp-Barton, Buckinghamshire, England. Now the joke was out. Even under such unpromising circumstances it told. Here were two mortals, passionately devoted of course, and in that state of matrimonial experience when all things tend to the wildest overrating, so cast down, so utterly prostrated by the foul Sea Demon, that they positively did not care a rush for each other. The great

Jermyn lay, faintly ejaculating 'Steward, Ste-w-a-ar-d,' at intervals, and making neither lament nor inquiry about his similarly suffering bride. As for Augusta, she had scarce more strength of body or mind than permitted her to moan out, 'I shall die, I shall die'; and apparently, for all she cared, in that unreal, phantasmal, pseudo-existence, which only was not death, though more dreadful, Jermyn Croker might have fallen overboard, or have been changed into a Seedee stoker. Then for this to happen to Jermyn Croker, of all people! The humour of the situation was inexhaustible!

And though the fierce south wind departed and the *Nubia* drove swiftly majestic across the long seas that part Cape Otway from the stormy Leuwin, though in due time the spice-laden gales blew 'soft from Ceylon's isle,' and the savage peaks of Aden, the lofty summit of the Djebel Moussa rose to view in the grand succession of historical landscapes; yet to the last day of the voyage a stray question in reference to the precise effects of very bad cases of sea-sickness would be directed, as to persons of proved knowledge and experience, to Mr. and Mrs. Jermyn Croker, by their fellow-passengers.

It is due to Mr. Croker, as a person of importance, to touch lightly upon his after-career. His wife discovered too late that in reaching England he had only changed the theme upon which his universal depreciations were composed. 'Non animam sed cœlum mutant qui trans mare currunt.' He abused the climate and the people of England with a savage freedom only paralleled by his Australian practice. Becoming tired of receiving 3 or 4 per cent for his money, he one day, in a fit of wrath, embarked one-half of his capital in a somewhat uncertain South American loan. His cash was absorbed, to

reappear spasmodically in the shape of interest, of which there was little, while of principal it soon became apparent that there would be none.

Reduced to the practice of marked though not distressing economy, Mr. Croker enjoyed the peculiar pleasure which is yielded to men of his disposition, of witnessing the possession of luxuries by others and a style of living which they are debarred from emulating. He was gladdened, too, by the occasional vision of an Australian with more money than he could spend, who rallied him upon his grave air, and bluntly asked why he was such a confounded fool as to sell out just as prices were really rising. Finally, to aggravate his sufferings, long unendurable by his own account, Mr. Parklands had the effrontery to come home, and, in the very neighbourhood where he, Croker, was living for economy, to buy a large estate which happened to be for sale.

The unfailing flow of the new proprietor's high spirits, his liberal ways, and frank manners, combined with exceptional straight going in the hunting-field, rendered him immensely popular, as indeed he had always contrived to be wherever fate and speculation led his roving steps. But it may be questioned whether his brother-colonist ever saw his old friend spinning by behind a blood team, or heard of his being among the select few in a 'quick thing,' without fulminating one of his choicest anathemas, comprehending at once the order to which he and Parklands had belonged, the country they had quitted, and the one in which they now sojourned.

Mr. Banks remained in the employment of Mr. Neuchamp at Rainbar until, having saved and acquired

by guarded investment a moderate capital, he had a tempting offer of joining, as junior partner, in the purchase of a large station in new country. Always a good-looking, manly fellow, he managed to secure the affections of a niece of Mr. Middleton, whom he met on one of his rare trips to Sydney, and, before he left for the Tadmor Downs, Lower Barcoo, they were married.

Mr. Joe Freeman had employed some of the compulsory leisure time rendered necessary during his fulfilment of the residence clause for Mr. Levison, in an exhaustive study of the Crown Lands Alienation Act. From that important statute (20 Vic. No. 7, sec. 13) he discovered that, provided a man had children enough, there is but little limit to the quantity of the country's soil that he can secure and occupy at a rate of expenditure singularly small and favourable to the speculative 'landist' of the period.

Thus Joe Freeman, after considerable ciphering, made out that he could 'take up' for himself and his three younger children a total of twelve hundred and eighty acres of first-class land! He had determined that as long as there was an alluvial flat in the colony his choice should not consist of *bad* land. Added to this would be a pre-emptive grazing right of three times the extent. This would come to three thousand eight hundred and forty acres, which, added to the freehold of twelve hundred and eighty acres, gave a total of five thousand one hundred and twenty acres. The entire use of this territory he could secure by a payment of five shillings per acre for the *freehold portion* only—say, three hundred and twenty pounds.

'Of course his three children were compelled, by law, to reside on their selections. As two of these were



under five years old, some difficulty in the carrying out of the apparently stringent section No. 18 might be anticipated.

This difficulty was utterly obliterated by building his cottage *exactly* upon the intersecting lines of the four half-sections, thus :



By this clever contrivance Mary Ellen, the baby, as well as Bob, aged three years, were 'residing upon their selections' when they were in bed at night, inasmuch as that haven of rest (for the other members of the family) was carefully placed across the south line which divided the estates.

Nor was this all. Bill Freeman took up a similar quantity of land in precisely the same way, locating it about a mile from his brother's selection, so that as it was clearly not worth any other selector's while to come between them, they would probably have the use of another section or two of land for nothing. The squatter on whose run this little sum was worked out was a struggling, burdened man, unable to buy out or borrow. He was ruined. But the individual, in all ages, has suffered for the State.

Mr. Neuchamp's Australian career had now reached a point when life, however heroic, is generally conceded to be less adventurous. His end, in a literary sense, is near. We feel bound in honour, however, to add the information, that upon the assurance of Mr. Frankston that they could not leave New South Wales temporarily

at a more prosperous time, Ernest Neuchamp resolved once more to tempt the main, and to taste the joy of revisiting, with his Australian bride, his ancestral home.

Having taken the precaution to call a council of the most eminent floriculturists of flower-loving Sydney to his aid, he procured and shipped a case of orchidaceous plants, second to none that had ever left the land, for the delectation of his brother Courtenay. He had long since paid the timely remittance which had so lightened his load of anxiety in the 'dry season' at Rainbar, with such an addition of 'colonial interest' as temporarily altered the views of the highly conservative senior as to the soundness of Australian securities.

Upon the genuine delight which Antonia experienced when the full glory of British luxury, the garnered wealth of a thousand years, burst upon her, it is not necessary here to dilate, nor, after a year's continental travel, upon the rejoicings which followed the birth of Mr. Courtenay Frankston Neuchamp at the hall of his sires. His uncle immediately foresaw a full and pleasing occupation provided for his remaining years, in securing whatever lands in the vicinity of Neuchampstead might chance to be purchasable. They would be needed for the due territorial dignity of a gentleman, who, upon his accession to the estate, would probably have thirty or forty thousand a year additional to the present rental, to spend on one of the oldest properties in the kingdom.

'He himself,' he said, 'was unhappily a bachelor. He humbly trusted so to remain, but he was proud and pleased to think that the old House would once more be worthily represented. He had never seen the remotest possibility of such a state of matters taking place in his

own time, and had never dreamed, therefore, of the smallest self-assertion.

‘The case was now widely different. The cadet of the House, against, he would frankly own, his counsel and opinion, had chosen to seek his fortune on distant shores, as had many younger sons unavailingly. He had not only found it, but had returned, moreover, with the traditional Princess, proper to the King’s younger son, in all legends and romances. In his charming sister he recognised a princess in her own right, and an undeniable confirmation of his firmly-held though not expressed opinion, that his brother Ernest’s enthusiasm had always been tempered by a foundation of prudence and unerring taste.’

Again in his native land, in his own county, Antonia had to submit to the lionisation of her husband, who came to be looked upon as a sort of compromise between Columbus and Sir Walter Raleigh, with a dash of Francis Drake. The very handsome income which the flourishing property of Rainbar and Mildool, *cum* Back-blocks A to M, and the unwearied rainy seasons and high markets, permitted him to draw, was magnified tenfold. His liberal expenditure gratified the taste of the lower class, among whom legends involving romantic discoveries and annexations of goldfields received ready credence.

Mr. Ernest Neuchamp was courteously distinguished by the county magnates, popular among the country gentlemen who had been his friends and those of his family from his youth, and the idol of the peasantry, who instinctively discerned, as do children and pet animals, that he viewed them with a sympathetic and considerate regard.

When Mrs. Ernest Neuchamp, of Neuchampstead, was

presented to her Gracious Sovereign by 'the Duchess,' that exalted lady deigned to express high approval of her very delicately beautiful and exquisitely apparelled subject from the far southern land, and to inquire if all Australian ladies were so lovely and so sweet of aspect and manner as the very lovely young creature she saw before her. The Court Circular was unprecedentedly enthusiastic; and in very high places was Ernest assured that he was looked upon as having conferred lustre upon his order and benefits upon his younger countrymen, to whom he had exhibited so good and worthy an example.

All this panegyric demonstration Ernest Neuchamp received not unsuitably, but with much of his old philosophical calmness of critical attitude. What he really had 'gone out into the wilderness' to see, and to do, he reflected he had neither seen nor done. What he found himself elevated to high places for doing, was the presumable amassing of a large fortune, a proceeding popular and always favourably looked upon. But this was only a secondary feature in his programme, and one in which he had taken comparatively little interest. He could not help smiling to himself with humorous appreciation of the satiric pleasantry of the position, conscious also that his depreciation of great commercial shrewdness and boldness in speculation was held to be but the proverbial modesty of a master mind; while the interest which he could not restrain himself from taking in plans for the weal and progress of his old friend and client, Demos, was considered to be the dilettante distraction with which, as great statesmen take to wood-chopping or poultry-rearing, the mighty hunter, the great operator of the trackless waste, like Garibaldi at Caprera, occupied himself. It was hardly worth while doing battle with

the complimentary critics, who would insist upon crediting him with all the sterner virtues of their ideal colonist—a great and glorious personage who combined the autocracy of a Russian with the *savoir faire* of a Parisian, the energy of an Englishman with the instinct of a Parsee and the rapidity of an American; after a while, no doubt, they would find out their god to have feet of clay. He would care little for that. But, in the meanwhile, no misgivings mingled with their enthusiastic admiration. The younger son of an ancient house, which possessed historic claims to the consideration of the county, had returned laden with gold, which he scattered with free and loving hand. That august magnate ‘the Duke’ had (vicariously, of course—he had long lost the habit of personal action save in a few restricted modes) to look to his laurels. There was danger, else, that his old-world star would pale before this newly-arisen constellation, bright with the fresher lustre of the Southern Cross.

All these admitted luxuries and triumphs notwithstanding, a day came when both Ernest Neuchamp, and Antonia his wife, began to approach, with increasing eagerness and decision, the question of return. In the three years which they had spent ‘at home’ they had, they could not conceal from themselves, exhausted the resources of Britain—of Europe—in their present state of sensation.

Natural as was such a feeling in the heart of Antonia, with whom a yearning for her birthland, her childhood’s home, for but once again to hear the sigh of the summer wave from the verandah at Morahnnee, was gradually gaining intensity, one wonders that Ernest Neuchamp should have fully shared her desire to return. Yet such was undoubtedly the fact.

Briton as he was to the core, he had, during the third year of their furlough, been often impatient, often aweary, of an aimless life—that of a gazer, a spectator, a diletante. Truth to tell, the strong free life of the new world had unfitted him for an existence of a mere recipiency.

A fox-hunter, a fisherman, a fair shot, and a lover of coursing, he yet realised the curious fact that he was unable to satisfy his personal needs by devoting the greater portion of his leisure to these recreations, perfect in accessories and appointments, unrivalled in social concomitants, as are these kingly sports when enjoyed in Britain.

Passionately fond of art, a connoisseur, and erstwhile an amateur of fair attainment, a haunter of libraries, a discriminating judge of old editions and rare imprints, he yet commenced to become impatient of days and weeks so spent. Such a life appeared to him now to be a waste of time. In vain his brother Courtenay remonstrated.

‘I feel, my dear Courtenay, and it is no use disguising the truth to you or to myself, that I can no longer rest content in this little England of yours. It is a snug nest, but the bird has flown over the orchard wall, his wings have swept the waste and beat the foam; he can never again, I fear, dwell there, as of old; never again, I fear.’

‘But why, in the name of all that is exasperating and eccentric, can you not be quiet, and let well alone?’ asked Courtenay, not without a flavour of just resentment. ‘You have money; an obedient, utterly devoted father-in-law, of a species unknown in Britain; a charming wife, who might lead me like a bear, were I so fortunate as to have been appropriated by her; troops of friends, I might almost say admirers—for you must own



you are awfully overrated in the county. What in the wide world can urge you to tempt fortune by re-embarkation and this superfluous buccaneering ?'

'I suppose it is vain to try and knock it out of your old head, Courtenay, that there is no more buccaneering in New South Wales than in old South Wales. But, talking of buccaneers, I suppose I *am* like one of old Morgan's men who had swung in a West Indian hammock, and seen the sack of Panama; thereafter unable to content himself in his native Devon.

'You might as well have asked of old Raoul de Neuchamp to go back and make cider in Normandy, after he had fought shoulder to shoulder with Taillefer and Rollo at Hastings, and tasted the stern delight of harrying Saxon Franklins and burning monasteries. I have found a land where deeds are to be done, and where conquest, though but of the forces of Nature, is still possible. Here in this happy isle your lances are only used in the tilt-yard and tournament, your swords hang on the wall, your armour is rusty, your knights fight but over the wine-cup, your ladye-loves are ever in the bowers. With us, across the main, still the warhorse carries mail, the lances are not headless, and many a shrewd blow on shield and helmet rings still.

'I am in the condition of "The Imprisoned Huntsman"—

'My hawk is tired of perch and hood,  
My idle greyhound loathes his food,  
My steed is weary of his stall,  
And I am sick of captive thrall ;  
I would I were, as I have been,  
Hunting the roe in forest green,  
With bended bow and bloodhound free,  
For that is the life that is meet for me.'

‘I know from experience that it is as probable that a star should come down from the sky and do duty in the kitchen grate,’ said Courtenay Neuchamp sardonically, ‘as that you should listen to any one’s opinion but your own, or I would suggest that the falcon, and greyhound, and steed business is better if not exclusively performed in this hemisphere. I never doubted you would go your own road. But what does Antonia say to leaving the land of court circulars and Queen’s drawing-rooms and Paris bonnets fresh once a week?’

‘She says’—and here Mrs. Neuchamp crept up to her husband’s side and placed her hand in his—‘that she is tired of Paradise—tired of perfect houses, unsurpassable servants and dinners, drives and drawing-rooms, lawn parties and archery meetings, the Academy and the Park, Belgravia and South Kensington—in fact, of everything and everybody except Neuchampstead and dear old Courtenay. She wants, like some one else, to go out into the world again, a real world, and not a sham one like the one in which rich people live in England. She is *living*, not life. Perhaps I am “*un peu* Zingara”—who knows? It’s a mercy I’m not very dark, like some other Australians I have seen. But it is now the time to say, my dear Courtenay, that Ernest and I have grown tired of play, and want to go back to that end of the world where work grows.’

‘Please don’t smother me with wisdom and virtue,’ pleaded Courtenay, with a look of pathetic entreaty. ‘I know we are very ignorant and selfish, and so on, in this old-fashioned England of ours. I really think I might have become a convert and a colonist myself, if taken up early by a sufficiently zealous and prepossessing mission-aress. I feel now that it is too late. Club-worship is

with me too strongly ingrained in my nature. Clubs and idols are closely connected, you know. But are we never to meet again?' and here the rarely changed countenance of Courtenay Neuchamp softened visibly.

'We will have another look at you in late years,' said Antonia softly; 'perhaps we may come altogether when——when——we are old.'

'I think I may promise that,' said Mr. Neuchamp. 'When Frank is old enough to set up for himself at Morahmee, with an occasional trip to Rainbar and Mildool, to keep himself from forgetting how to ride, then I think we may possibly make our last voyage to the old home, in preparation for that journey on which I trust we three may set forth at periods not very distantly divided.'

The brothers shook hands silently. Antonia bestowed a sister's kiss upon the calm brow of the elder brother, and quitted the room. No more was said. But all needful preparations were made, and ere the autumn leaves had commenced to fall from the aged woods which girdled Neuchampstead, the *Massilia* was steaming through the Straits of Bonifacio with Ernest Neuchamp watching the snowy mountain-tops of Corsica, while Antonia alternately enlivened the baby Frank or dipped into *The Crescent and the Cross*, which she had long intended to read over again in a leisurely and considerate manner.

But little remains to tell of the after-life of Ernest Neuchamp. Settled once more in 'the sunny land,' he found his time fully and not unworthily occupied in the superintendence of his extensive properties and investments. There was much necessary journeying between Rainbar and Morahmee, at which latter place Paul Frank-

ston had insisted upon their taking up their permanent abode. 'I am going down hill,' he said; 'the old house will be yours when I am gone; why should I sit here lonely in my age while my darling and her children are so near me? Don't be afraid of the nursery-racket bothering me. Every note of their young voices is music in my ears, being what they are.' So in Ernest's absence in the bush, or during the sitting of the House of Assembly—having from a stern sense of duty permitted himself to be elected as the representative of the electoral district of Lower Oxley—Antonia had a guardian and a companion. She resolved upon making the journey to Rainbar, indeed, in order that she might fully comprehend the nature of the life which her husband had formerly led. During her stay she formed a tolerably fair estimate of the value of the property, being a lady of an observing turn of mind, and possessing by inheritance a hitherto latent tendency towards the management of affairs not generally granted to the sex. She visited Lake Antonia, and warmly congratulated Mr. Neuchamp upon that grand achievement. She patted Osmund and Ben Bolt, now bordering on the dignity of pensioners. She drove over to Mrs. Windsor's cottage at Mildool, where she found Carry established as rather a *grande dame*, with the general approbation of the district and of all the tourists and travellers who shared the proverbial hospitality of Mildool. She caused the stud to be driven in for inspection, when she had sufficient presence of mind to choose a pair of phaeton horses for herself out of them. But she told her husband that she could not perceive any advantage to be derived from living at Rainbar as long as their income maintained its present average, and that he could manage the interesting but

exceedingly warm and isolated territory equally well by proxy.

Jack Windsor, upon Mr. Banks's promotion and marriage, became manager of the whole consolidated establishment, with a proportionate advance in salary. He developed his leading qualities of shrewdness and energy to their fullest capacity under the influence of prosperity. Being perfectly satisfied with his position and duties, having a good home, a contented wife, the means of educating his large family, the respect of the whole country-side, and the habit of saving a large portion of his liberal salary, besides an abundance of the exact species of occupation and exercise which suited him, it is not probable that he will make any attempt to 'better himself.' It is not certain that Mrs. Windsor would not favour the investment of their savings in property 'down the country' for the sake of the children, etc.; but Jack will not hear of it. 'I should feel first-rate,' he says scornfully, 'shouldn't I, in a place of my own, with a man and a boy, and forty or fifty head of crawling cattle to stare at while they were getting fit for market? That's not my style. It wouldn't suit any of us—not you either, old woman, to be poking about, helping at the wash-tub or something, or peelin' potatoes for dinner. We couldn't stand it after the life we've had here. I couldn't do without half-a-dozen stabled hacks and a lot of smart men to keep up to the mark. Give me something *big* to work at, done well, and paying for good keep and good spending all round. Five hundred and forty head of fat cattle cut out in two days like the last Mildool lot, and all the country-side at the muster—that's John Windsor's style—none of your Hawkesbury corn-shelling, butter-and-eggs racket. You

ought to have married old Homminey, Carry, if that's what you wanted. Besides, after thinking and saving and driving up to high pressure for the master so long, it would feel unnatural-like to be only working for myself.' So the argument was settled. Mr. Windsor had, it seems, tasted too fully of the luxury of power and command to relinquish it for humble independence.

The undisputed sway over a large staff of working hands, the unquestioned control of money and credit, within certain limits, had become with him more and more an indispensable habitude. Accustomed to the tone of the leader and the centurion, he could not endure the thought of changing his wide eventful life into the decorous dullness of the small landed proprietor. Mrs. Windsor, too, who dressed exceedingly well, and was admitted on equal terms to the society of the district, a position which, from her tact, good sense, and extremely agreeable appearance, she suitably filled and fully deserved, would probably, as her husband forcibly explained, have felt the change almost as much as himself. So Mr. Neuchamp was spared the annoyance of looking out for a new manager.

Hardy Baldacre accumulated a very large fortune, but was prevented, in middle life, from proving the exact amount of coin and property which may be amassed by the consistent practice of grinding parsimony, combined with an elimination of all the literary, artistic, social, and sympathetic tendencies. He habitually condemned the entire section, under the fatal *affiche* of 'don't pay.' To the surprise—we cannot with accuracy affirm, to the regret—of the general public, this very extensive proprietor fell a victim to a fit of *delirium tremens*, supervening upon the practice of irregular and excessive



alcoholism. Into this vice of barren minds, the pitiless economist, guilty of so few other recreations, was gradually but irresistibly drawn.

The *White Falcon* fled far and fast with the fugitive noble, whose debts added the keenest edge among his late friends and creditors to the memory of his treasons. He escaped, with his usual good fortune, the civil and criminal tentacula in which the dread octopus of the law would speedily have enveloped him. He laughed at British and Australian warrants. But passing into one of the Dutch Indian settlements, he was sufficiently imprudent to pursue there also the same career of reckless expenditure. By an accident his character was disclosed, and his arrest effected at the moment of premeditated flight. A severe logic, learned in the strict commercial schools of Holland, where debt meets with no favour, guards the commerce of her intertropical colonies. The *White Falcon* was promptly seized and sold to satisfy a small portion of the princely liabilities of the owner, while for long years, in a dreary dungeon, like another and a better sea-rover, Albert von Schütterheims was doomed to eat his heart in the darksome solitude of an ignoble and hopeless captivity.

The Freeman family prospered in a general sense. Abraham Freeman settled down upon a comfortable but not over-fertile farm in the neighbourhood of Bowning. The thickness of the timber, and the conversion of much of it into fencing-rails, served to provide him with occupation, and therefore with good principles, as Tottie saucily observed, to his life's end. That high-spirited damsel grieved much at first over the slowness and general fuss about trifles, which, after her extended experience, seemed to her to characterise the whole district, but was event-

ually persuaded by a thriving young miller that there were worse places to reside in. He was resolute, however, in forbidding the carrying of bags of flour, and as she was provided with a smart buggy and unlimited bonnets, her taste for adventurous excitement became modified in time, and the black ambling mare was handed over to the boys.

William and Joe Freeman made much money by nomadic agrarianism. After years passed in arduously constructing sham improvements and 'carrying out the residence clause,' with no intention of residing, they found themselves able to purchase a station.

Having paid down a large sum in cash, they entered into possession of their property with feelings of much self-gratulation, as being now truly squatters, just as much so, indeed, as Mr. Neuchamp, who had thought himself so well able to patronise them. But, unluckily for them, and in direct contravention of the saying, 'Hawks winna pike oot hawks' een,' the ex-owner of the station, formerly indeed an old acquaintance who had risen in life, displayed the most nefarious keenness in plotting an unscrupled treachery. He settled down, under the conditional purchase clause, section 13, upon the very best part of the run, the goodwill of which he had the day before been paid for. Having a large family, and the land laws having been recently altered so that a double area could be selected by each 'person,' he, with the Messrs. Freemans' own cash, actually annexed, irrevocably, an area which reduced the value of the grazing property by about one-third. Shrewd and unscrupulous as themselves, he calmly informed the frantic Freemans 'that he had only complied with the law.' He laughed at their accusations of bad faith. 'Every man for him-

self,' he retorted, adding that 'if all stories were true, they hadn't been very particular themselves, but had sat down on the cove's run that first helped 'em when they was bull-punchers without credit for a bag of flour.'

Rendered furious by this very original application of their own practice to the detriment of their own property, they wasted much of their—well—we must say, legally acquired gains in endless suits and actions for trespass against this most unprincipled free selector, and others who shortly followed his example. The lawyers came to know Freeman *versus* Downey as a *cause célèbre*. It is just possible that these brothers may come to comprehend, by individual suffering, the harassed feeling which their action had, many a time and oft, tended to produce in others.

The later years of Mr. Neuchamp's life have been stated by himself to be only too well filled with prosperity and happiness as compared with his deserts. Those who know him are aware that he could not become an idler—either aimless or bored. He lives principally in Sydney. But if ever he finds a course of unmitigated town-life commencing to assail his nervous system, he runs off to a grazing station within easy rail, where he has long superintended the production of the prize shorthorns, Herefords, and Devons necessary for the keeping up the supply of pure blood for his immense and distant herds. Here he revels in fresh air—the priceless sense of pure country life—and that absolute leisure and absolute freedom from interruption which the happiest paterfamilias rarely experiences in the home proper. Here Ernest Neuchamp builds up fresh stores of health, new reserves of animal spirits. Here Ernest probably thinks out those theories of perfected represent-

ative government in which, however, he fails at present to persuade an impatient, perhaps illogical, democracy to concur. His children are numerous, and all give promise, as, after a protracted and impartial consideration of their character, he is led to believe, of worthily carrying forward the temporarily modified but rarely relinquished hereditary tenets of his ancient House.

Time rolls on. The great city expanding beautifies the terraced slopes and gardened promontories of the glorious haven. Old Paul Frankston lies buried in no crowded cemetery, but in a rock-hewn family vault under giant araucarias, within sound of the wave he loved so well. Yet is Morahmee still celebrated for that unselfish, unrestricted hospitality to the stranger-guest which made Paul Frankston's name a synonym for general sympathy and readiest aid.

Assuredly Ernest Neuchamp, now one of the largest proprietors in Australia, both of pastoral and urban property, has not suffered the reputation to decline. He remembers too well the hearty open visage, the kindly voice, the ready cheer of him who was so true at need, so delicate in feeling, so stanch in deed. Succoured himself at the crisis of fortune and happiness, he has vowed to help all whose inexperience arouses a sympathetic memory. The opinion of a social leader and eminent pastoralist may be considered to have exceptional weight and value. However that may be, much of his time is taken up in honouring the numberless letters of introduction showered upon him from Britain. Young gentlemen arrive in scores who have been obligingly provided with these valuable documents by sanguine ex-colonists. By the bearers they were regarded as passports to an assured independence. Some of these youthful squires, with

spurs unwon, need restraining from imprudence, others a gentle course of urging towards effort and self-denial. But it has been noticed that the only occasions on which their respective guide, philosopher, and friend speaks with decision bordering on asperity, is when he exposes the fallacy of the reasoning upon which any ardent neophyte aspires to the position of A Colonial Reformer.

THE END











